Crete in Colour

TEXT BY OLIVIER REVERDIN PHOTOGRAPHS BY R. G. HOEGLER • THAMES AND HUDSON

CRETE IN COLOUR

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PREFACE BY DR N. PLATON

88 COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUDOLF HOEGLER

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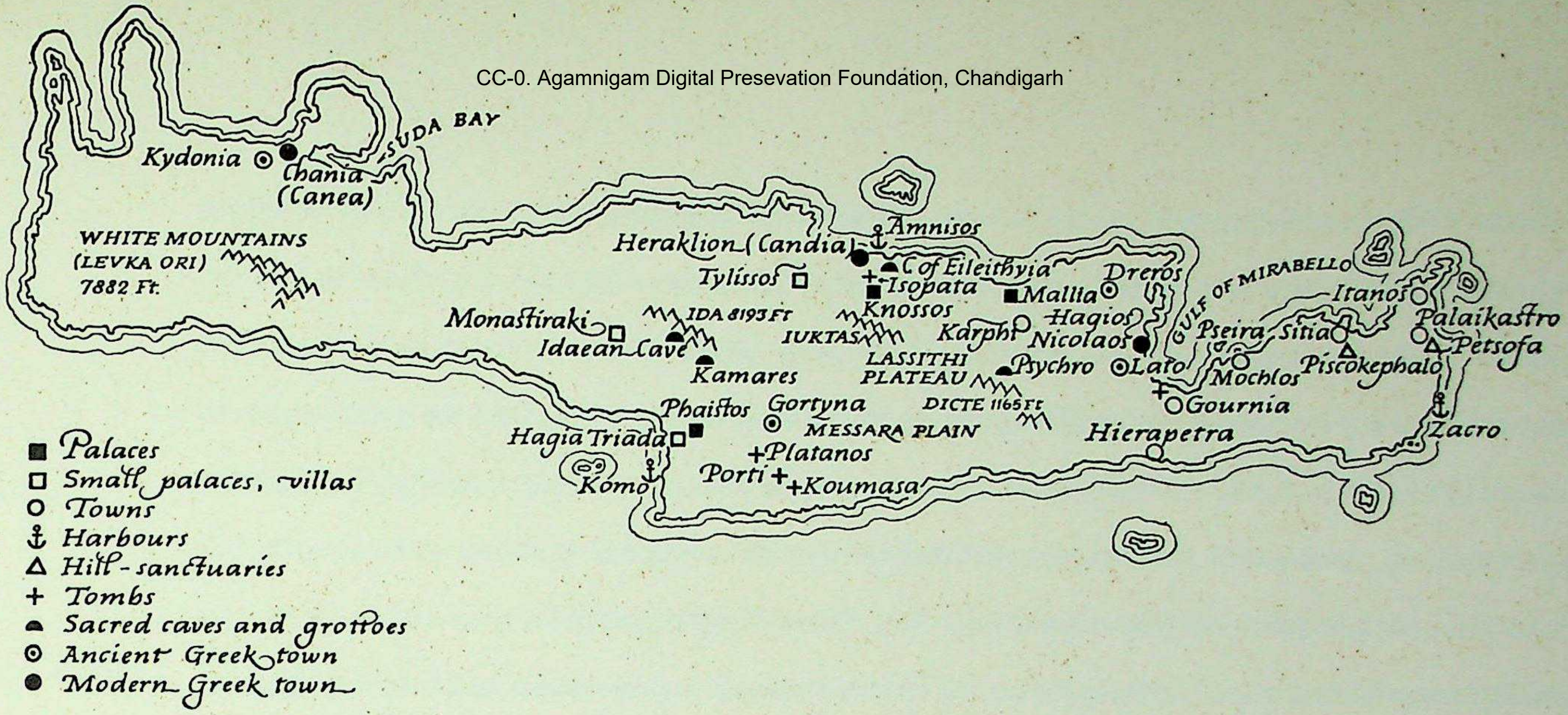

SUDA BAY
Kydonia
Chania (Canea)
WHITE MOUNTAINS (LEVKA ORI) 7882 Ft.
Heraklion (Candia)
Amnisos
Tylissos
C of Eileithyia
Isopata
Knossos
Mallia
Dreros
GULF OF MIRABELLO
Itanos
Palaikastro
Petsofa
Monastiraki
IDA 8193 Ft
IUKTAS
Idaean Cave
Kamares
Karphi
Hagios Nicolaos
Pseira
Sitia
Mochlos
Piscokephalo
LASSITHI PLATEAU
Psychro
Lato
Gournia
Phaistos
Gortyna
DICTE 1165 Ft
Hagia Triada
MESSARA PLAIN
Hierapetra
Zacro
Platanos
Komo
Porti
Koumasa
■ Palaces
□ Small palaces, villas
○ Towns
⚓ Harbours
△ Hill-sanctuaries
+ Tombs
Sacred caves and grottoes
⊙ Ancient Greek town
● Modern Greek town

'There is a land, named Crete, fruitful and fair,
Set like a jewel in the wine-dark sea,
Peopled by countless multitude of men
And ninety cities...'

(Homer, Odyssey, XIX, 171–4)

FOREWORD

The island of Crete enjoys a unique situation. Lying as it does amid the waters of the Eastern Mediterranena it is virtually the meeting-place of the three great continents which formed the ancient world. Large, fertile, densely populated, and highly civilized, Crete sent her ships and her traders to the farthest frontiers of the world as she then knew it. And her long historical and spiritual tradition survived even internal discord and the final decline of Cretan wealth and power, to influence the civilized world for centuries after.

The ancient Egyptians were deeply impressed by 'The great ones of the Kefti from the islands amid the green seas', who brought superb gifts to exchange with their Pharaohs. The eastern world envied the peace and good order that the island enjoyed at a time when most of its neighbours were suffering strife and lawlessness. Gradually, the spreading influence of Crete transformed a barbarous corner of the earth into a cultured one—an achievement for which Europe was later to be profoundly grateful.

Wisely, the Greek world followed in the footsteps of this highly cultured civilization, and adopted its written language—the language that has brought us some of the world's greatest literature. This far-off golden age has left behind it a host of memories, legends and traditions—some of them dark, strange and ominous, others irresistibly enchanting. King Minos, master of the seas, and Rhadamanthus, the great judge; the unique system of justice upon which their rule was based; the astonishing technical feats of the 'Daedala'; and above all, the fantastic Labyrinth itself. These take pride of place in the story of Crete, and their influence was to linger on in Cretan myth and ritual. Many Cretans actually believed that they had seen the legendary bronze giant, Talôs, as he carried out his endless patrol round the coasts of the island for whose protection he was created. There is a tradition that the ritual dance long performed in the sacred cypress grove of Rhea, the 'animal goddess' was the very one devised by Daedalus and performed by Ariadne on the site of the Labyrinth itself. For centuries, pilgrims made their way up the mountain of Dicte to the sacred stalactite cave in which Zeus was born, and on the white peaks of Mount Ida the *curetes* faithfully performed the weapon-dances devised to cover the cries of the young god—who, legend says, was fed in his infancy by the sacred bees and the goat Amaltheia.

In even the latest stages of the Greek civilization, men looked up with awe to the summit of Iuktas, near Knossos, and pointed out the young god's burial-place. And the Dictaean cave itself echoed year after year to the fervent cries of those who celebrated the return of 'Zeus Kretagenes' swooping down to earth in all the vigour of his annually renewed life, and bringing all the blessings of fertility. The Greeks looked back with reverence to Crete. From Crete came their supreme god Zeus; from Crete came much of the ancient wisdom that was to inspire their philosophers. From Crete, too, came the basis of their legal system and the great tradition of wise and incorruptible judges—a tradition which is both a historical fact and a time-honoured legend stretching back to one of the oldest of the Greek myths: the appointment of Minos and Rhadamanthus, after their death, as judges of the dead in the underworld.

The Minoan civilization lasted for centuries—and then vanished with comparative suddenness which still puzzles us. The Greeks used to boast that Knossos fell to the old Athenian kings. And yet some enormous natural catastrophe did take place at about the time when the Minoans disappeared, and similar, though smaller upheavals were to recur periodically.

Modern scholars are inclined to believe that the sudden and final disappearance of the Minoan towns was caused by a terrible earthquake, which may also have given rise to the legend of the lost island of Atlantis. The remains of the Minoan civilization were discovered at a comparatively recent date. Sixty years of research work by Greek, English, Italian, American and French archaeologists, following the vital initial work of Sir Arthur Evans, have brought to light some of the most important Minoan monuments. Palaces, royal villas, estates and *megara* (meeting-halls); towns, settlements, royal tombs and humbler cemeteries have been discovered, spreading over most of eastern and central Crete.

Comparable finds from Egypt and Mesopotamia helped the experts to date the Cretan discoveries, which belong to the third and second millennia B.C. Most of the art treasures that were found have remained in Crete, making the Candia Museum at Heraklion a Mecca for all who wish to study the Minoan civilization. Still more vital information may yet be revealed with the decipherment of the small inscribed tablets that were found in huge numbers at the palace of Knossos and in the villa at Hagia Triada. But the most striking—and fascinating—evidence of this highly cultured civilization which flourished so long ago is supplied by the visible and tangible treasures yielded by the excavations. Some of the finest and most significant of these treasures are illustrated in this book.

THE REBIRTH OF MINOAN CRETE

In the first volume of his History of the Peloponnesian war, Thucydides wrote 'Minos is the first of the well-known traditional characters to command a fleet, and to control the greater part of the present-day Greek Sea. His dominion extended also to the Cyclades; on most of these islands, he founded the first colonies. He drove out the Carians and made his sons governors. As far as he could, he rid the seas of pirates, which is very understandable, for in this way he safeguarded his imports.'

This passage is one of several which can be quoted to show that the Greeks had not forgotten Crete's former mastery of the seas. They knew that a mighty king, Minos, once ruled the Aegean; that Knossos, on Crete, was his capital, and that his people were not of Hellenic origin. But this vague and sketchy historical knowledge signified little. No definite memories existed of one of the most distinguished civilizations of all time. Because the Minoans left no literature behind them, they sank into oblivion.

In certain Theban tombs in Egypt, there are wall-paintings portraying men who, in the accompanying hieroglyphic inscriptions, are designated 'keftius'. Slender, lithe, dressed in coloured loin-cloths and often armed with a short dagger, they pass in procession with their gifts. These gifts were to puzzle archaeologists for many years; they are beautiful metal vessels different in form from anything previously known. Some were ornamented with full-face representations of bulls' heads, others with spirals which we associate with Greek border designs.

Who were the 'Keftius'? Where did they come from? Many efforts were made to answer these questions, but the final solution remained elusive. As late as 1897, Gaston Maspero in his *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l'Orient classique*, a work that was long regarded as authoritative, wrote of 'These mysterious Kefâtiou, whose name alone has been preserved.' He took them to be Syrians.

Little more than sixty years ago, then, the Minoan civilization was quite unknown. So its awakening was all the more spectacular.

THE EXCAVATIONS

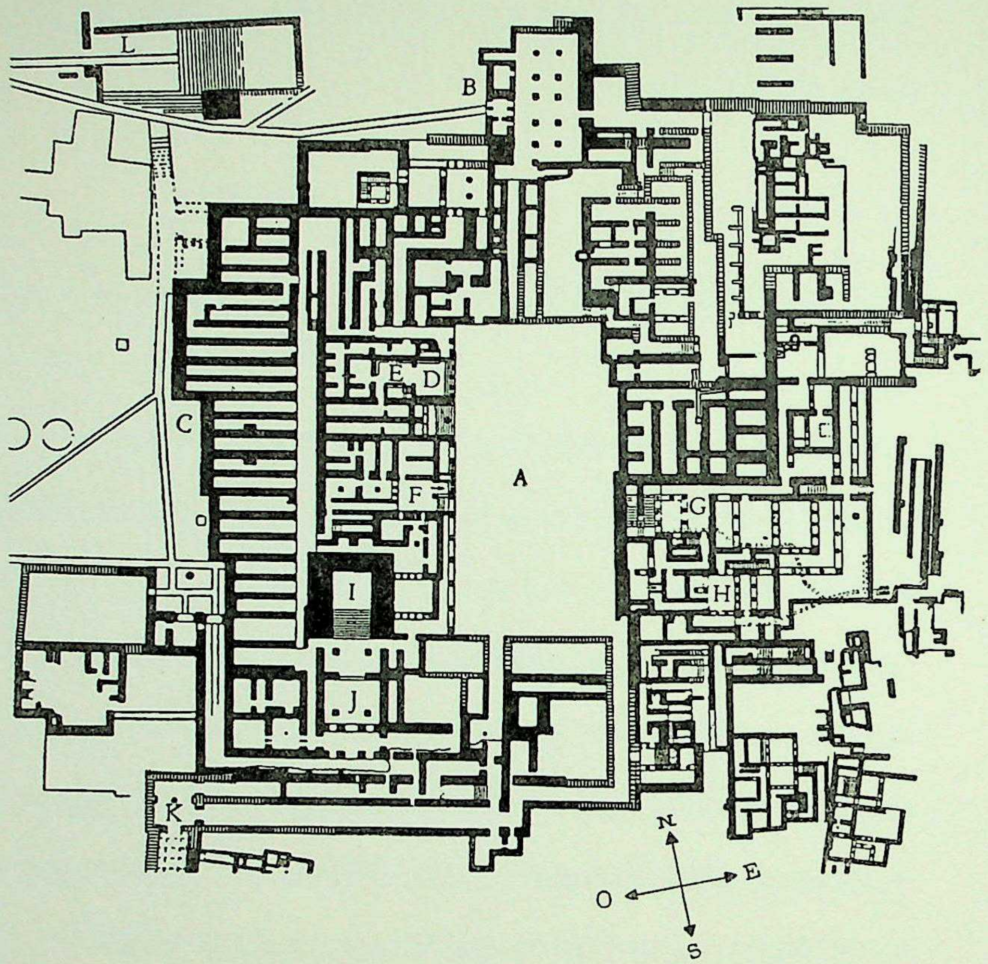
The archaeological investigation of Crete was long delayed, owing to political circumstances. Until the end of last century the island was in perpetual revolt against the Turks, and such activities would have constituted too hazardous an undertaking.

It is true that in 1886 an expedition was planned by Schliemann, who had recently unearthed the treasures of Troy and Mycenae, and revealed to the world the Achaean civilization in all its brilliance of gold and gems. Schliemann hoped to explore the region of Knossos, where, for ten years or so, finds had been reported. But he had to abandon the idea. The French School in Athens was also unlucky. But individual archaeologists roamed the countryside, and sporadic finds multiplied. In 1895, an Italian field party found very beautiful polychrome vases in the cave at Kamares; other sites yielded further finds.

In 1900, Crete proclaimed her independence. Now that conditions were normal, the British archaeologist Arthur Evans, who had already worked on the island, set about the task of excavating the ruins of Knossos. Within the span of six years he brought to life an entire civilization, freed Minos from the mists of legend, solved the identity of the mysterious Keftius and, by his discovery of long-buried masterpieces, permanently enriched the world's artistic inheritance.

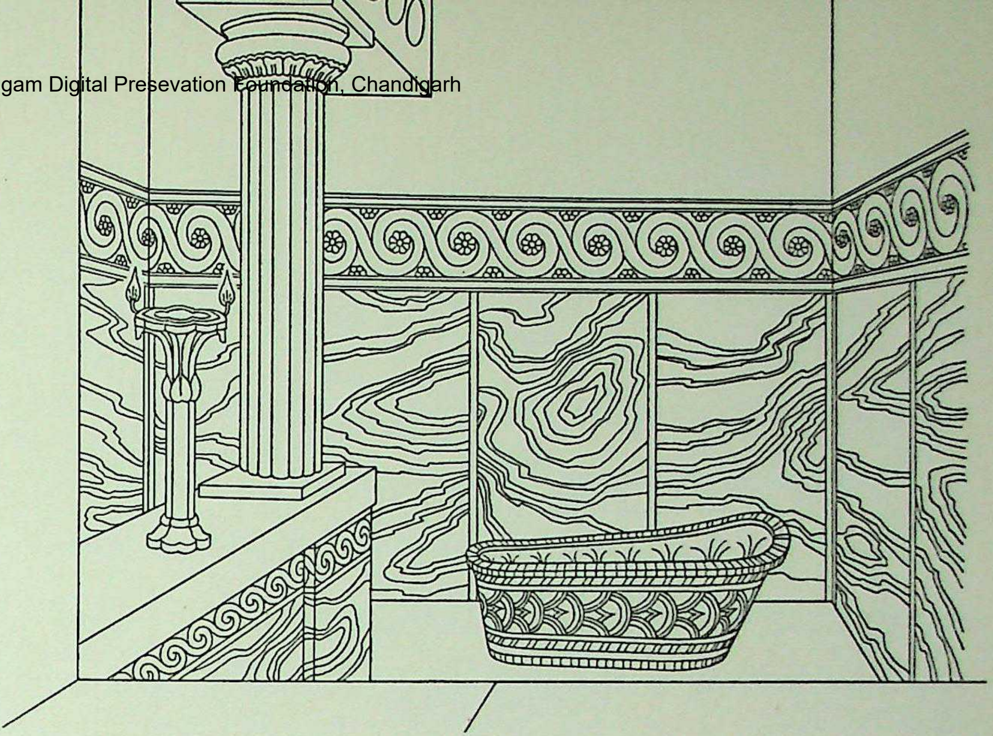
The excavations, studies and reconstruction work continued for a quarter of a century. Evans put everything—his time, his energy, his learning and his fortune—into this enterprise. He published his findings in a book that is still fundamental to the study of the Minoan culture; the four-volume work *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, 1921–1936.

A	Central Court
B	Portico of the north entrance
C	Store-houses
D	Ante-room of the Throne Room
E	Throne
F	Small Shrine of the Great Goddess
G	Hall of the Colonnade, and way up to the King's apartments
H	Queen's apartments
I	Great Stairway
J	Entrance hall to the Great Stairway
K	South-west entrance
L	'Theatre'



What Evans discovered—and methodically investigated—was not just a single palace. It was a whole sequence of palaces, built one after the other upon the same site over a period of six centuries. Beneath the palaces were dwellings dating back to the Late Stone Age. And in the immediate neighbourhood, houses, villas and graves were discovered—a whole complex of monuments which gave definite proof of the existence of a splendid city.

While Evans was digging at Knossos, an Italian expedition headed by Halbherr and Pernier excavated the great palace of Phaistos in the Messara plain, and the nearby villa of Hagia Triada, where some of the most superb known examples of Minoan art were found. Meanwhile, the Americans laid bare the ruins of the little town of Gournia with its houses, streets, squares and modest palace. They also carried out a systematic



Knossos—The Queen's bathroom (reconstruction after Evans, *The Palace of Minos)*

investigation of the whole region around the Isthmus of Hierapetra and the Gulf of Mirabello, making many discoveries in Pseira and Mochlos.

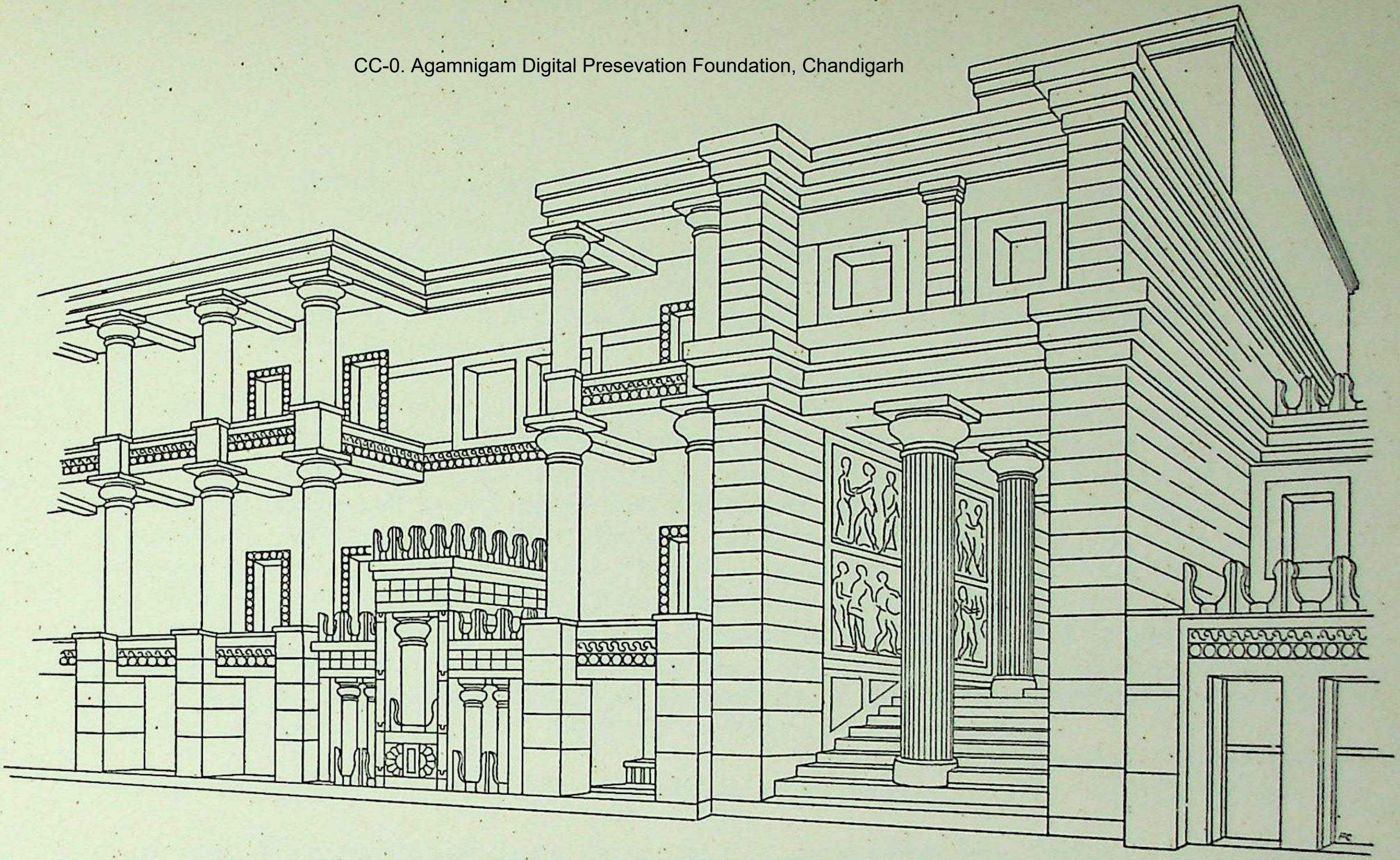
Greek archaeologists also played an active part in investigating the island, and certain Greek names will always be associated with Crete: Stephan Xanthoudidis, Joseph Hadjidakis, Spiros Marinatos, and Nikolaos Platon the present Curator of Antiquities at Heraklion, to name only four. To them we owe countless vitally important discoveries. And although not enough money was available for them to excavate the great palaces themselves, we owe to one of them, Hadjidakis, the discovery in 1915 of the palace of Mallia on the north coast, halfway between Knossos and the Gulf of Mirabello. Subsequently, Mallia was carefully excavated by the French School in Athens. The most important work was carried out under Fernand Chapouthier and Pierre Demargne. Its size and the richness of the finds place this palace third in line after Knossos and Phaistos.

Evans' party did not confine their excavations to Knossos. They also did remarkable work in the eastern part of Crete: in the district of Palaikastro and on the sacred hill of Petsofa. These sites yielded some very original works of art. And it was Pendlebury who first studied the interrelation between culture, settlement and population on the upland plateau of Lassithi, from the Late Stone Age to the Hellenistic era. His findings would not excite the layman, since this was a rural area with none of the richness and splendour of the palaces. The objects found in the tombs and houses are rustic, primitive. Yet Pendlebury's investigations, conducted according to modern methods, produced valuable information. Primarily, they demonstrated the fact that, during the Minoan peace, the people built their houses in the middle of their settlement areas; but that, with the unrest that began towards 1400 B.C. and grew serious when the Dorians arrived about 1100, the Minoans retreated to the steep slopes of Karphi, which could be more easily defended.

Mention should also be made of the prospecting carried out by German archaeologists while Hitler's troops were occupying Crete. In the western half of the island they came across Minoan settlements hitherto almost unexplored. These include repositories which probably belonged to a palace near Monastiraki on the western flank of Mount Ida.

This brief survey will indicate the intense—and sometimes competitive—activity of Greek archaeologists and foreign field parties. Between them, they have reconstructed the picture of a civilization which we are coming to recognise more and more clearly as the fountain-head of our own.

Some of these archaeological sites in Crete have enchanting natural surroundings. The wide plains of the Phaistos region have real grandeur, flanked as they are by steep mountains and with the vista, beyond Dibaki, of the 'Egyptian sea' glimmering in the distance. The bucolic charm of Mallia, with its olive groves, is enlivened by the Aegean near at hand. From the rocky slopes upon which the houses of Gournia are clustered, one can look outward to the Gulf of Mirabello in its awe-inspiring frame of sheer cliffs—one of the most impressive of all Mediterranean landscapes. Palaikastro and Zakro are unforgettable in their charm. And yet, attractive as these places are, most visitors are disappointed when they see the actual remains of the palaces, houses and graves. The masonry is in a sad state. Nothing remains of the plasterwork save a few remnants, gullied by the rain and parched by the fierce Cretan sun. The wall paintings have long disappeared. Nearly everything, in fact, is levelled to the ground. Only the great paved court and stairway of Phaistos can claim impressive, monumental beauty.



Knossos—East side of the Great Court (reconstruction after Evans, *The Palace of Minos)*

Everywhere else the disconcerted visitor finds himself wandering through the maze of walls. Everywhere, except at Knossos, where conscientious if unlovely restorations help us to picture the vanished splendour of the Palace of Minos.

What really does entrance the visitor to Minoan Crete is the museum in Heraklion (Candia). Everything—or very nearly everything—of archaeological interest is to be found there, for only a very few works of art have left the island. It is, in fact, fortunate that the excavations did not begin earlier. Had they done so, the spoils of Crete would doubtless have been divided up between the British Museum, the Louvre, Berlin and the big American museums.

As it is, they remain together in Crete, arranged and displayed by Nikolaos Platon, Curator of the museum, with as much taste as expert knowledge.

All the same, a casual visit will not suffice. The loveliest objects are often the smallest, and it takes time to discover them in their show-cases and savour them. But how enormously worthwhile the trouble is! Slowly, a vanished world comes to life and begins to yield up its secrets. Quite apart from the visual pleasure, there is the excitement of abrupt encounter with a civilization which was lost to the memory of man for three thousand years before the archaeologists revived it so dramatically.

The comparative remoteness of Crete means that a large proportion of its visitors arrive in organised parties. Too often the visit to the Heraklion museum consists of a mass descent from a motor coach to which, all to soon, the party must return for the next stage of the day's outing. It would be an understatement to point out that, under these conditions, full appreciation of the museum's treasures is quite impossible. The Minoan culture is so remote, so subtle in its appeal that it frequently fails to come to life at all for those who must approach it in this cursory way.

HISTORY AND CHRONOLOGY

So far, no trace of Early Stone Age man has been found on Crete. The island's first known inhabitants were Neolithic. They lived by hunting and fishing, and probably also kept domestic animals. Their tools were made of polished serpentine, of bones and of wood, and also of obsidian from the Cycladic island of Milo. They made pots, which they decorated, and little clay figurines which they baked; natural caves or rectangular dry stone huts served them as dwellings.

We cannot accurately date this Late Stone Age. Some experts are of the opinion that it began in the sixth millennium B.C.; others maintain that man did not arrive on Crete before 4,000 B.C. Where did he come from? The answer is generally believed to be Asia Minor, but there is no reliable evidence for this.

The Minoan period proper starts about 2600 B.C. Although there is nothing to suggest that this beginning coincides with a sudden invasion, there are many indications that the peoples in this part of the world were permanently on the move during the third and second millennia. In waves, the nomads rolled southward, one people hard upon the heels of another. Their migrations took in Italy, mainland Greece, Asia Minor and Syria. They even, on occasion, pushed forward as far as Egypt.

We know little about the cause of these migrations, but it seems likely to have been pressure from certain Indo-European peoples. They continued over long periods, yet the archaeological yields are too fragmentary to enable us to make a practical reconstruction of their successive phases. All we can be sure of is the fact that during the third millennium B.C., pre-Indo-European peoples spread westwards from the region of Anatolia in the direction of the Cyclades, Greece and Crete, and that the first Indo-Europeans began to penetrate to these areas and to Asia Minor only from about 2000 B.C. onwards.

The Ionians began the movement; they were followed by the Achaeans around 1700 B.C., and then came the Dorians. The appearance of copper about 3000 B.C., and then of bronze around 2600 B.C., is closely connected with these migrations.

The Minoan period is usually divided up according to the simple—perhaps too simple—scheme based by Evans on the stratification at Knossos, where the archaeological layers, in places, attain a depth of 30 feet. Evans' scheme specified three main periods, which he called Early Minoan (E.M.), Middle Minoan (M.M.) and Late Minoan (L.M.). He divided each of these periods into three further sub-periods: E.M. I, II and III; M.M. I, II and III; L.M. I, II and III. This somewhat arbitrary scheme—which really applied only to Knossos—has become established, partly from tradition, partly from convenience. But it gives a distorted picture of the main phases of the Minoan civilization. These phases could be briefly described as follows: Until about 2000 B.C., the Minoans live by farming in isolated clans; as yet, there are no large settlements. The fertile Messara plain, open to the South, is densely populated. There is prosperity in eastern Crete, and along the shores of the Gulf of Mirabello, where for some considerable time the inhabitants have been in contact with Asia Minor. The earliest proved relations with Egypt go back to about 2200 B.C.

Around the year 2000 there is a noticeable development; the first palaces of Knossos, Phaistos and Mallia date from this time. Major changes take place in the island's political structure. Techniques of all kinds improve; craftsmanship becomes specialised and more accomplished. The first beautiful vases of 'Kamares' ware appear, and the first masterpieces of goldsmith's work, seal engraving and terracotta sculpture are created. Crete carries on an intensive trade with Egypt and Asia. She is mistress of the Aegean. Her fleet comprises sailing ships and vessels with oars, whose elegant outlines appear on many Cretan works of art. The country's wealth is concentrated in the palaces and the towns. The first texts in linear script date from this period—though the script itself may well be far older.

It is clear that some enormous catastrophe occurred about 1700 B.C., but its precise nature remains unknown. It is generally believed to have been an earthquake, but it has also been attributed to a first invasion from the mainland by the harrying Achaeans. At all events, the palaces were razed to the ground and burnt, only to be rebuilt on a far larger and more lavish scale.

Thereafter, for two centuries, Minoan civilization was at its height. The King of Knossos extended his hegemony over the greater part of Crete, though the palaces of Phaistos and Mallia remained. This, too, is almost certainly the era—as the Greeks were to remember for centuries—of King Minos' thalassocracy. A decisive change took place around 1500 B.C. Texts in Linear B script dating from this period, and deciphered in 1953 by Ventris and Chadwick, show that Greek had become the official language in Knossos. This suggests that the Achaeans, then settled on the Greek mainland, had now gained control of Crete. Mallia and Phaistos, their palaces deserted, had sunk into decay.

But, as the last section of this book indicates, the Minoan civilization enjoyed one more golden age in the fifteenth century. About 1400 B.C. the palace of Knossos was completely destroyed. From now on, until the twelfth-century Dorian invasion, we can trace a rapid decline.

That, briefly, is a summary of known Minoan history as it stands at present. It is, of course, incomplete, and future discoveries may suggest modifications. But the main outlines seem likely to hold good.

Our main aids in arriving at the chronology of events just sketched are the contemporaneous Egyptian and

Mesopotamian civilizations. Especially significant were two dated Egyptian cartouches of the Pharaohs Khyân (dynasty of the Hyksos kings) and Thutmosis III, found at Knossos and near Heraklion respectively, as well as a clay cylinder of Hammurabi which was discovered in a tholos-tomb at Platanos (Messara). There are also certain Minoan objects which were found in Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia. But the dates indicated by these findings are purely approximate, and in fact the entire chronology of the classical Orient has been in a state of flux since 1942, when the latest King List of Khorsabad was discovered. As a result of this, the dates previously assumed for Hammurabi had to be brought forward three hundred years. His reign, originally fixed at 2123–2081 B.C., is now variously assumed to have been 1848–1806 B.C., 1792 to 1750 B.C., and even 1728–1686 B.C.

Increasing knowledge of the archaeology of Asia Minor, Syria and Cyprus gives us reason to hope that still further comparative information will become available, and that, stage by stage, we shall be able to visualize more clearly the framework within which the Minoan civilization developed.

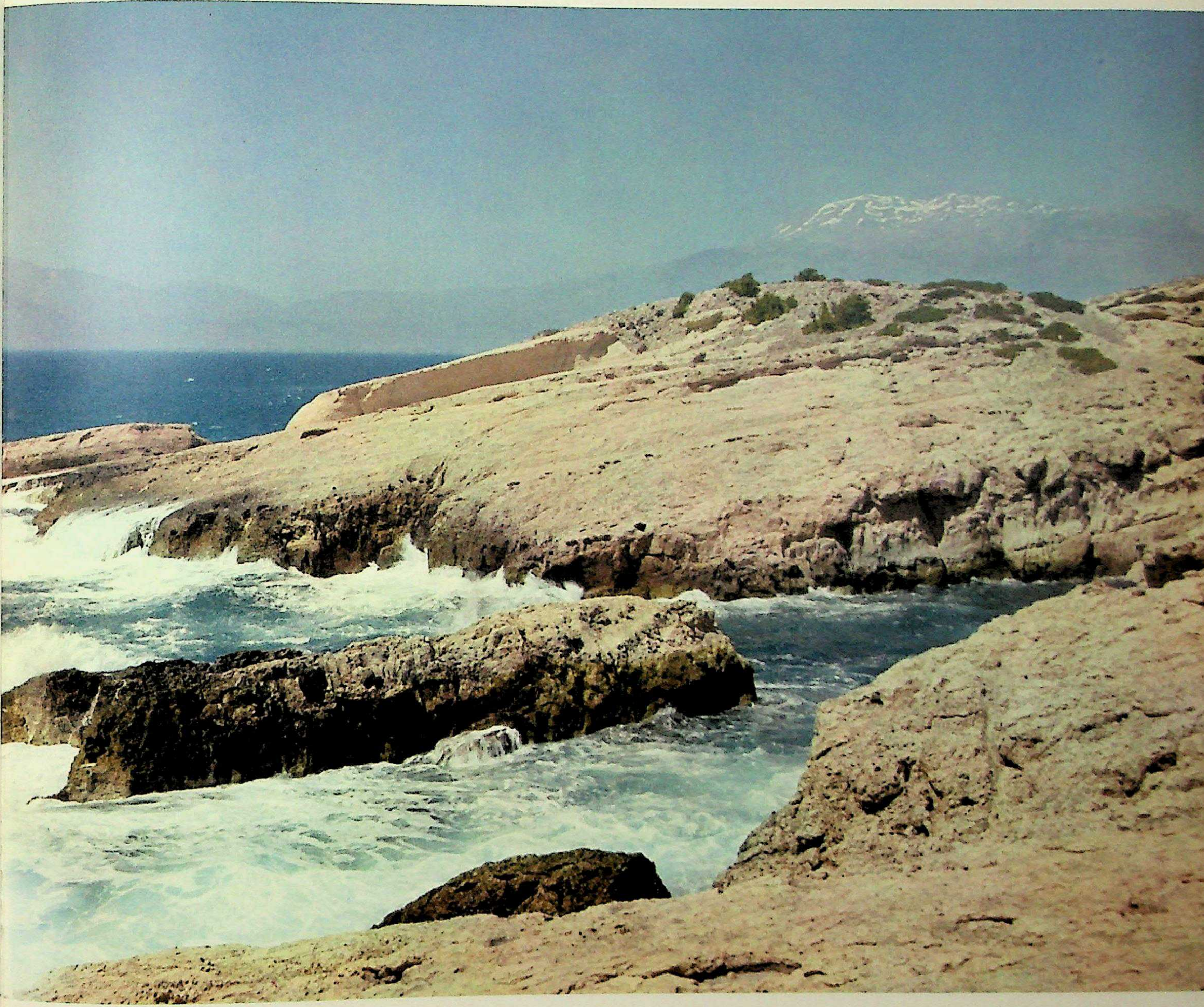
THE COUNTRY

Attempt to explain the main characteristics of a civilization as the product of the physical surroundings within which it evolved, and you will find yourself up against some absurd contradictions. There is, for example, the oft-repeated assertion that Greece was inevitably destined, by virtue of its geography, to be divided into separate political units. And yet the phase of the city states lasted, at the most, for a mere six or seven centuries, within a historical era of three and a half millennia, during which Greece was, in the main, dependent upon a single national or foreign power. And what is more, the Greeks even transplanted their system of independent and rival city states to countries like Sicily, whose geography placed no barriers in the way of trade or of cultural unity.

And yet it would be just as foolish to err in the opposite direction, and claim that geography has no bearing upon the development of civilizations, for every people must adjust itself to the conditions of the land on which it lives. The Minoans were no exception. The sea surrounding Crete protected them. Instead of dissipating most of their energies defending themselves against hostile neighbours, as most of the Asiatic peoples had to do, they could use their talents to create cultural values of a positive, peace-loving kind. In this respect their situation may be compared with that of the ancient Egyptians, also protected by Nature, who likewise had a highly-developed, flourishing civilization.

Crete is an island, 160 miles long, and varying in width between 35 and 7½ miles. Situated halfway between central Greece and Cyrenaica, it is practically at the same latitude as Sfax in Tunisia and Biskra in southern Algeria. Along its southern shores are steep cliffs, where the hills drop sheer into the sea; apart from the

Coast in the Gulf of Messara, with Mount Ida in the distance 21



Bay of Messara, there are no natural harbours and no anchorages. Between this inhospitable coast and the shores of Africa lies a stretch of sea between 200 and 250 miles across, which is subject to the most violent storms. It was off the Cretan coast that the tempest tossed the ship of the Apostle Paul who was sailing from Caesarea to Ostia (Acts, 27, 7 ff.). From the west, the island seems less isolated; the strait that separates it from the Peloponnese is interrupted by the islands of Cythera and Anticythera. But these are stormy waters that sailors have always feared.

To the north, in the Aegean, navigation is easier. Here are many natural harbours and flat beaches up which boats can be drawn. From the Late Stone Age onwards, intensive trade with Argolis and Attica had been carried on from this coast. The ships could put in at the Cyclades on the way.

The best communications of all are those with the mainland to the east. From the eastern part of Crete, land is always in sight. The island of Kasos lies but 20 miles distant from Itanos and Palaikastro, whilst between Kasos and Karpathos there is only a narrow strip of water. From Karpathos, it is hardly more than 20 miles to Rhodes, which is within easy reach of the coast of Asia Minor. By sailing along that coast, in the direction of Cyprus, it is possible to reach Byblos, Phoenicia and Egypt without having to venture out into the open sea. This sea-route was of paramount importance: if the Minoans came from Anatolia, as seems probable, they must have passed this way. Commerce with Asia and Egypt began along the same route. It is not surprising, then, that eastern Crete was to become, at such an early date, the cradle of an active and original civilization.

Approaching Candia, Crete with its spine of mountains appears like a great barricade rearing up out of the waters. From autumn until May, and sometimes well into June, the peaks are snow-covered. Still more impressive is the approach from the air, for during clear weather the whole length of the island can be seen at once. Crete is exceptionally rugged and mountainous. There are three great massifs; the White Mountains

22 View of the Messara plain from the palace of Phaistos

(Levka Ori or Aspra Vouna, 7882 ft) in the west, Psiloriti or Mount Ida (8193 ft) in the centre, and the Lassithi mountains or Dicte (7165 ft) in the east. The plains occupy less than four per cent of the total surface. Deep hollows between the mountain ranges make for easy communication between the northern and southern coasts. The most important of these is in the middle of the island between Ida and Dicte; it connects the Knossos region with the Messara plain. This plain, the largest and most fertile in Crete, was for a long time the most densely populated region and one of the most highly developed. Tholos-tombs found there suggest that towards the end of the third millennium the lands were divided among several clans, each with its own chief.

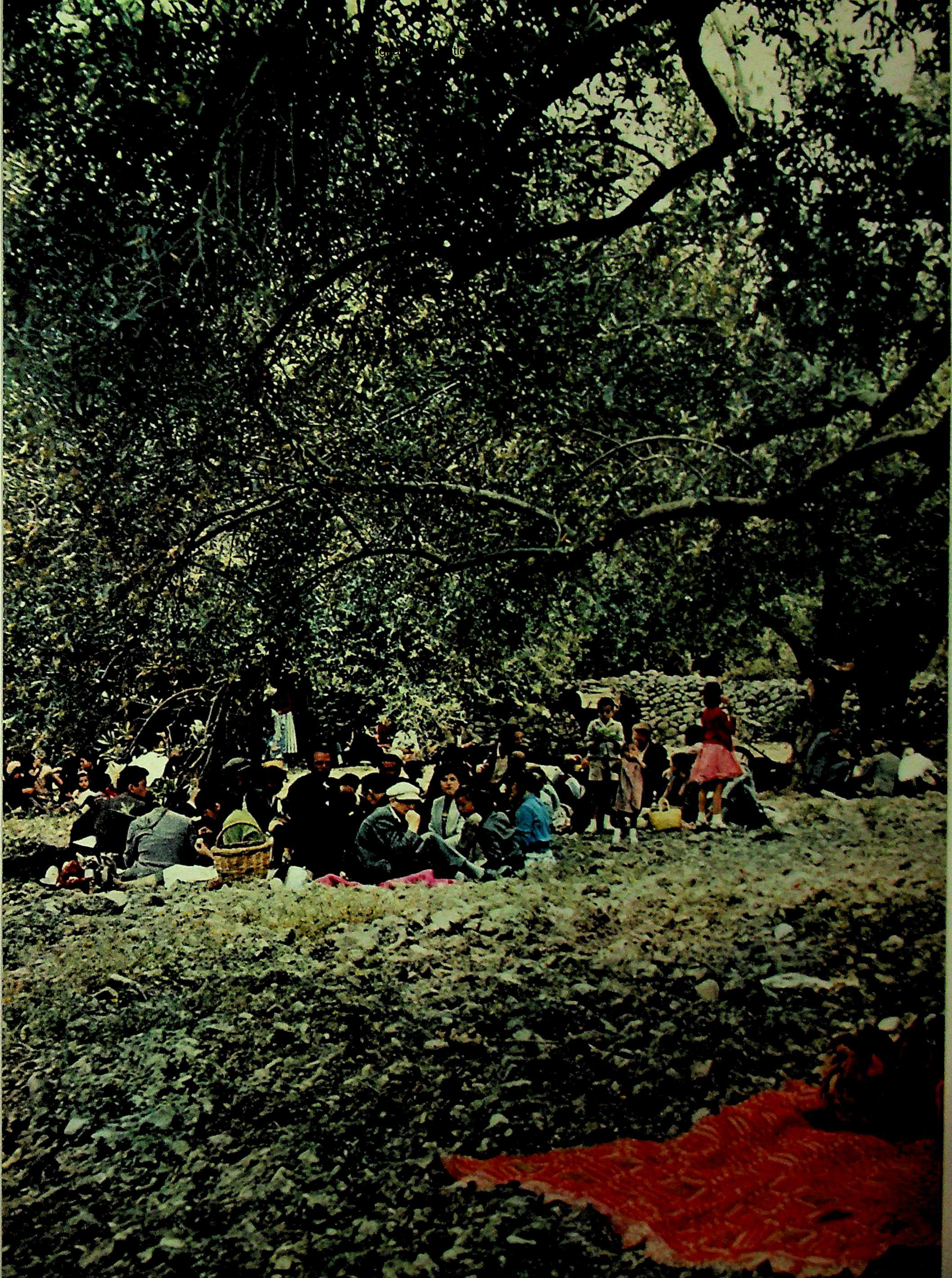
Made up largely of calcareous rock, the countryside has been furrowed by water, which has cut out deep clefts and caves wherein, from the Late Stone Age onwards, the gods were worshipped. Other unevennesses were due to underground subsidence. Earthquakes occur frequently: more than once they razed the Minoan palaces to the ground. This has been established by the archaeologists. For proof of the violence of these earthquakes we only have to recall the most recent one in 1856 which, at Heraklion, spared a mere 18 houses out of a total of some 3,600!

The chalky soil of Crete is relatively arid. The coastal tracts, however, are fertile and, despite the relentless destruction wrought by man, there are still some forests.

The crops are basically Mediterranean—and scarcely altered since Minoan times, when barley, wheat and millet were already grown in the valleys and upland plains, and on the hillsides. The grain was stored in earthenware jars, many of which have been found in the houses and palaces. It was employed for making bread, and perhaps beer as well.

The olive-trees (whose name goes back to pre-Hellenic times) provided the Minoans with oil, which was used for food, unguents and lamp fuel. Ancient olive-presses have been found, and the olive-tree appears

Cretan girl from Lebena 25
The village of Pigaithaki 26
Young Cretan peasant 27



on more than one work of art. It must have been a pre-eminently sacred tree. The olive harvest was celebrated with joyful processions, such as the one we see carved on a vase shown in this book (p. 110).

The vine, too, has a pre-Hellenic name. But, though we know that the Minoans cultivated grapes, we have little information about their methods of pressing the harvest and producing wine.

Livestock was kept in considerable quantity. A clay tablet from Knossos records—if our decipherment is correct—a herd of 20,000 sheep and 700 pigs. Bulls may still have lived in a half wild, half tamed state. The horse was not introduced before 1600 B.C.

Corn, oil, wine and livestock are still the most important products of Cretan agriculture. In addition to these, the Minoans grew flax and various kinds of fruit. Their fig-trees and date-palms occasionally appear on vases, and quince and plums were also grown. They liked to eat chick-peas, collected medicinal herbs and hunted the wild goat—a sport which is a favourite theme in their art. The sea provided them with fish, octopi, sponges, and also the murex-snail from which they made purple dye.

The island, we see, provided its inhabitants with abundant and varied resources. So it is not surprising that our knowledge of the Minoan civilization gives us an impression of well-being and prosperity.

Politically, the hills and mountains of Crete long encouraged the maintenance of autonomous communities going back to the times of the clans, but they were powerless to hold back the hegemony of Knossos, which spread over the whole central and eastern part of the island. Western Crete still remains largely unexplored and will not be dealt with in this book.

28 Coastal scenery near Hagios Nikolaos

29/30 Windmill near Mallia: olive tree and corn, Crete's enduring wealth

31/32 In the olive grove of Gortyna

THE FLOWERS OF CRETE

Ophrys

At whatever time of year you visit Crete, you are sure to find flowers. In autumn, small blossoms appear in the warm lowland areas, where during the mild, wet winter months the plants develop well enough to survive the searing heat of the summer, and produce flowers in October and November. In January and February the tall stems of the asphodel push their way up, and its first white, starry blossoms begin to open. Then, too, come a few early anemones. But the flowers are at their most triumphant during the final phase of the wet period, in March and in April–May in the slightly higher regions. Then, where the land is cultivated, and especially among the olive groves, the hillside terraces and verges are carpeted with tall blue and mauve anemones and white or dark pink ranunculus, while in the meadows of the Messara plain, scarlet gladioli and amber chrysanthemums stand straight and tall. And in the hilly central area of the island there are fields of white narcissi and pink-toned wild tulips. The 'wild country', used only as pasture-land for sheep and

Above: Tulip, *Ebenus cretica* Below: Rock-rose 35

Above: Wild tulips Below: *Sternbergia lutea* 36

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goats, presents a completely different picture. Everywhere—even though in parts it is craggy and rock-strewn—it is covered by an openwork mantle of bushes and shrubs, most of them surprisingly neat and rounded in shape. This shrub-clothed country is what the Greeks call 'Phrygana'. All these bushes flower, but they do so at different times, beginning towards the end of the rainy season and continuing into the summer. And so the 'wild country', seen from a distance, always has its own prevailing colour, which changes in a matter of weeks from yellow to white or rose-red. But it is often yellow; early in the year the horribly thorny *Calycotome spinosa*, which grows freely in the lowlands, breaks out in yellow flowers. Then there are the tall, yellow-flowering whorls of the different species of phlomis, with their thick and furry white leaves. Bright yellow too, though they bloom later in the year, are the low, round bushes of a thorny broom *(Genista acanthoclada)*. Still more yellow flowers: those of the spurges *(Euphorbiaceae)*. The tall, tree-like spurge *(E. dendroides)* grows mainly in the lower western belt; the bushy spurge *(E. charakias)* is found more in the mountains, while the small, thorny, rounded spurge *(E. acanthothamnus)* grows freely in the lower Phrygana.

Of these neatly rounded bushes, others bear unobtrusive greenish-brown or near-white flowers. And in between them, everywhere, the tall heads of the asphodel sway in the wind, while at ground level, small blue iris light up the intervening gaps.

From about the middle of April onwards, the rock-roses which grow freely among the wild flowers of the lowlands are covered with masses of gleaming white or rose-red blossoms which resemble wild roses. And during May and June, a really startling plant comes into flower: a large, blackish-red species of arum lily, the Cretan dracunculus, which grows to a height of about three feet.

When the hot, dry summer begins and the lowlands become more and more parched, the oleanders come into their own. For miles, the stream-beds are fringed with brilliant red. Now the flowers of the Phrygana

37 Asphodel

38 Mountain path amid flowering shrubs

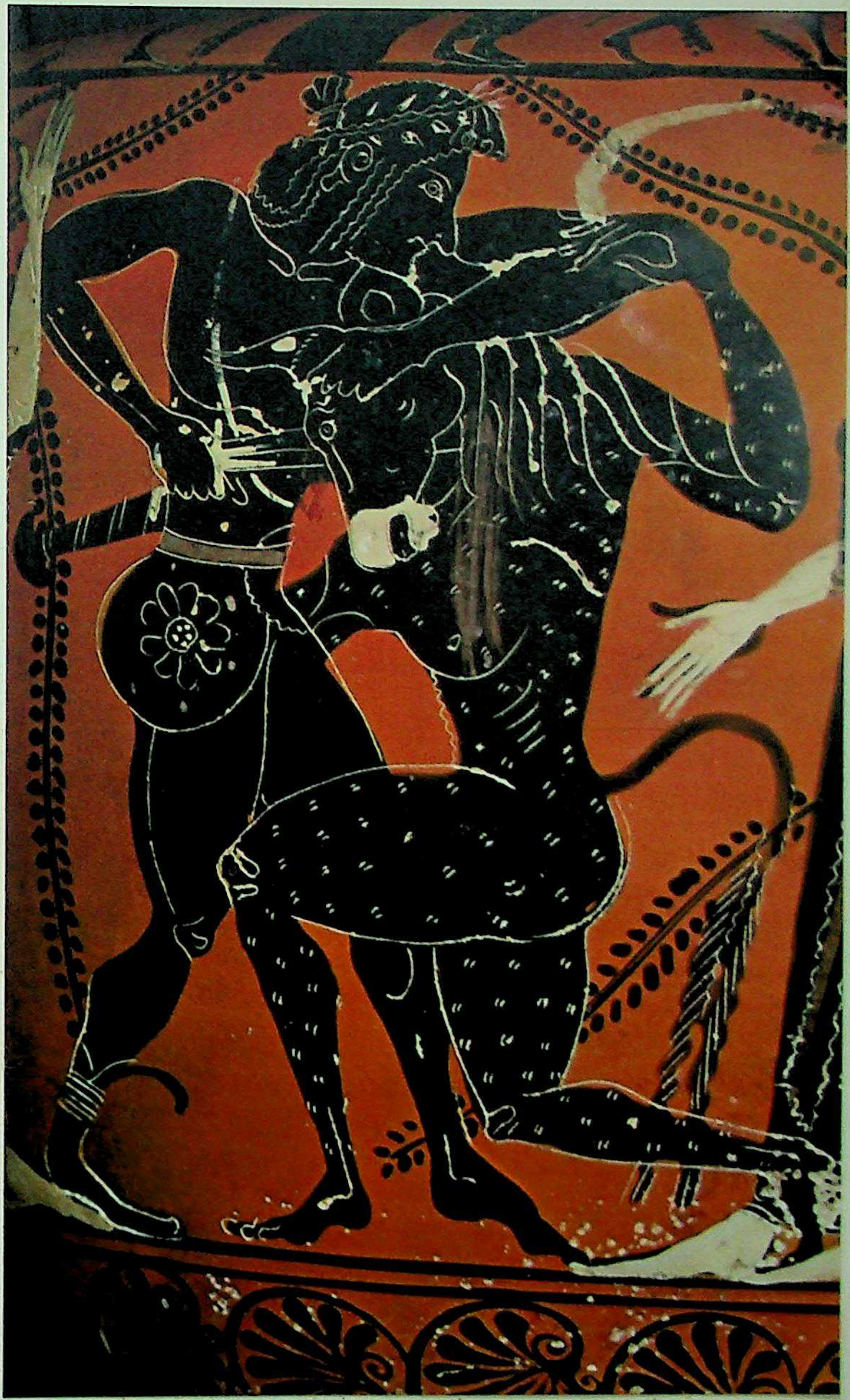
move higher up the mountainsides, and from mid-June until August the rose-red of the aromatic thyme is the colour that distinguishes the middle heights.

Even in the late summer, before the rains begin, still more new kinds appear. Near the coast, in particular, myriads of the tall, slender, white-flowered spikes of *Urginea maritima* take over from the asphodel. In shady spots, the tiny white cyclamens bloom until late in the year, and in several areas of the Phrygana the red heath *(Erica verticillata)* springs up, often growing quite tall.

But the rarer and more unusual of the Cretan flowers, most of them endemic—that is, not found outside the island—grow high on the sheer cliff-sides, or on rocky ledges in the deep shade of wild gorges. Among the many curious rock-plants, which often hang down in huge clumps from the rock-faces, one of the loveliest and most decorative is *Ebenus cretica*, which is heavy with rose-red flower-candles, all of them covered with silken white hairs.

Yet another Cretan miracle takes place in April, at a height of about 4,000 feet, and is repeated still higher in June and July. Just below the snow-patches, whole fields of pale yellow crocuses and star-like blue chionodoxas burst into bloom, and each pocket of soil between the ridged limestone rocks is covered with clumps of white anthemis flowers. But, beautiful though they are, these small plants fade quickly. High in the mountains, there are long-flowering, hardy plants which manage to avoid too-rapid loss of moisture by forming cushions *(Astralagus, Acantholimon)*, or with dense thorns *(Berberis cretica)*, or with a growth of white furry leaves *(Sideritis cretica)*. Their flowers—often, in the case of the cushion plants, an unspectacular white, otherwise mostly yellow—bloom, as might be expected, in the high summer. And even in the late summer—just a little lower down among the screes, you will find gleaming yellow or whitish-pink autumn crocuses *(Sternbergia lutia)* and miniature white autumn narcissi.

MINOS AND HIS PALACE



Theseus battles with the Minotaur Black-figure Attic vase, Vatican Museum

When Plato died at the age of eighty-one, he left unfinished the longest of his Dialogues, in which he had set down the results of a lifetime of philosophical meditation on the best possible form of government for the city state.

The scene of this Dialogue, called 'The Laws', is Crete. Three speakers take part in the discussion; an Athenian, a Cretan and a Lacedaemonian. It runs as follows:

—Tell me, Strangers, asks the Athenian, is a God or some man supposed to be the author of your laws?

—A God; in very truth a God: among us, he is said to have been Zeus, but in Lacedaemon, whence our friend here comes, I believe they would say that Apollo is their lawgiver...

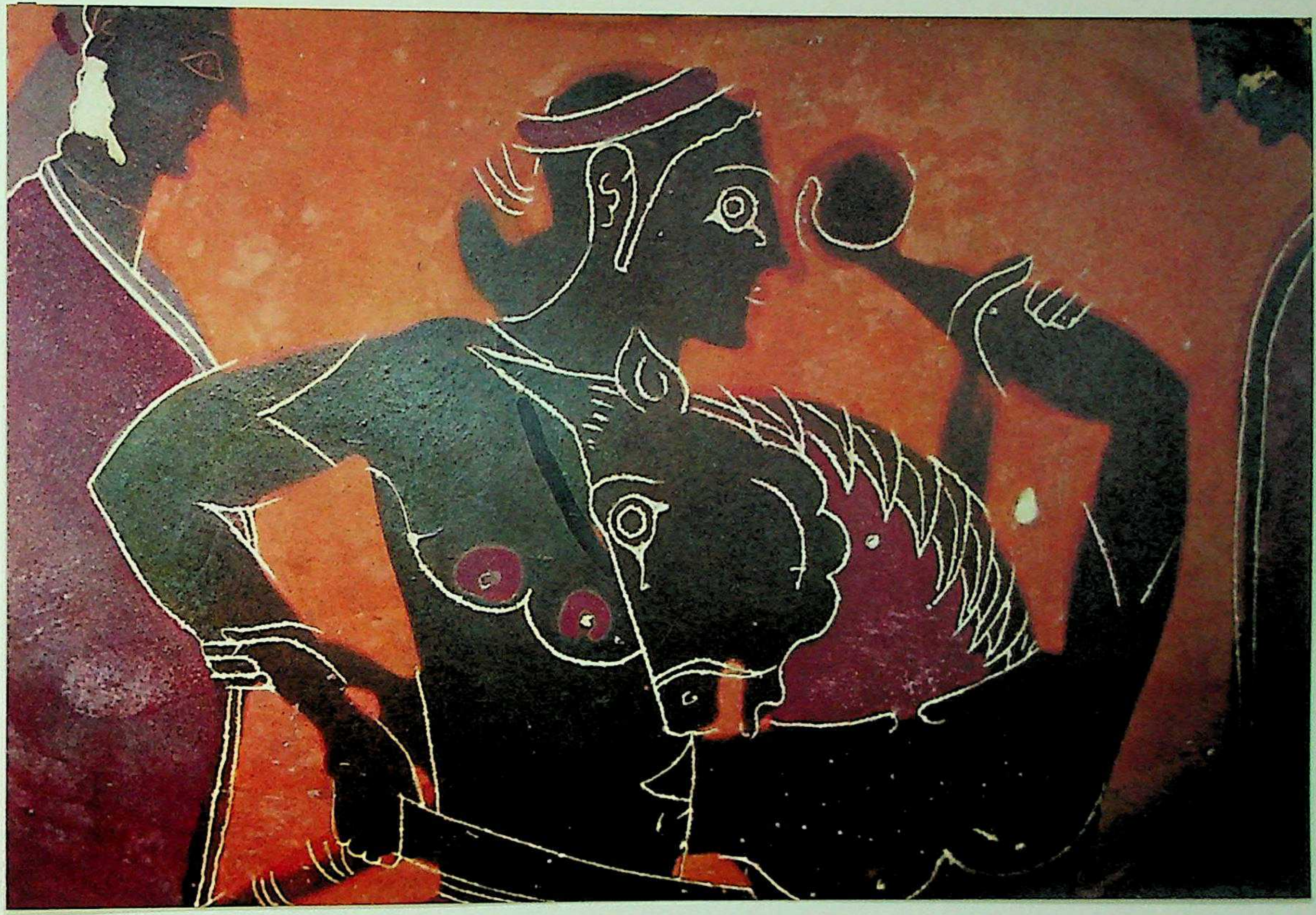
—And do you, Cleinias, believe, as Homer tells, that every ninth year Minos went to converse with his Olympian sire, and was inspired by him to make laws for your cities?

—Yes, that is our tradition; and there was Rhadamanthus, a brother of his, with whose name you are familiar; he is reputed to have been the justest of men, and we Cretans are of the opinion that he earned this reputation from his righteous administration of justice when he was alive.

—Yes, and a noble reputation it was, worthy of a son of Zeus. As you and your Lacedaemonian friend have been trained in these institutions, I dare say that you will not be unwilling to give an account of your government and laws... The distance from Knossos to the cave and temple of Zeus is considerable; and doubtless there are shady places under the lofty trees, which will protect us from this scorching sun. Being no longer young, we may often stop to rest beneath them, and get over the whole journey without difficulty, beguiling the time by conversation.

—Yes, Stranger, and if we proceed onward we shall come to groves of cypresses, which are of rare height and beauty, and there are green meadows, in which we may repose and converse (tr. Benjamin Jowett).

For the background to this discussion, whose theme was nearer to his heart than any other, Plato chose



Theseus battles with the Minotaur Black-figure Attic vase, Vatican Museum

Crete. More precisely, he chose the actual path followed every nine years by King Minos when he left his palace for the sacred cave and his mystical encounter with his father, Zeus. The choice is surely significant, for it proves that the memory of this exemplary king, his justice and his good rule remained alive for over a thousand years.

Homer was the first known writer to allude to the legend of Minos. Of the ninety cities of Crete, he mentions Knossos, the city ruled by Minos, the confidant once in every nine years of the great Zeus. Hesiod states that, 'of all mortal kings, none was more royal than he. He ruled over the multitudes inhabiting the land and held the sceptre of Zeus in his hands. His dominion extended also to the cities...'

The name of Minos, then, conjured up a picture of regal majesty and justice. As the son of Zeus, he ruled the people with his father's sceptre and in accordance with his father's laws.

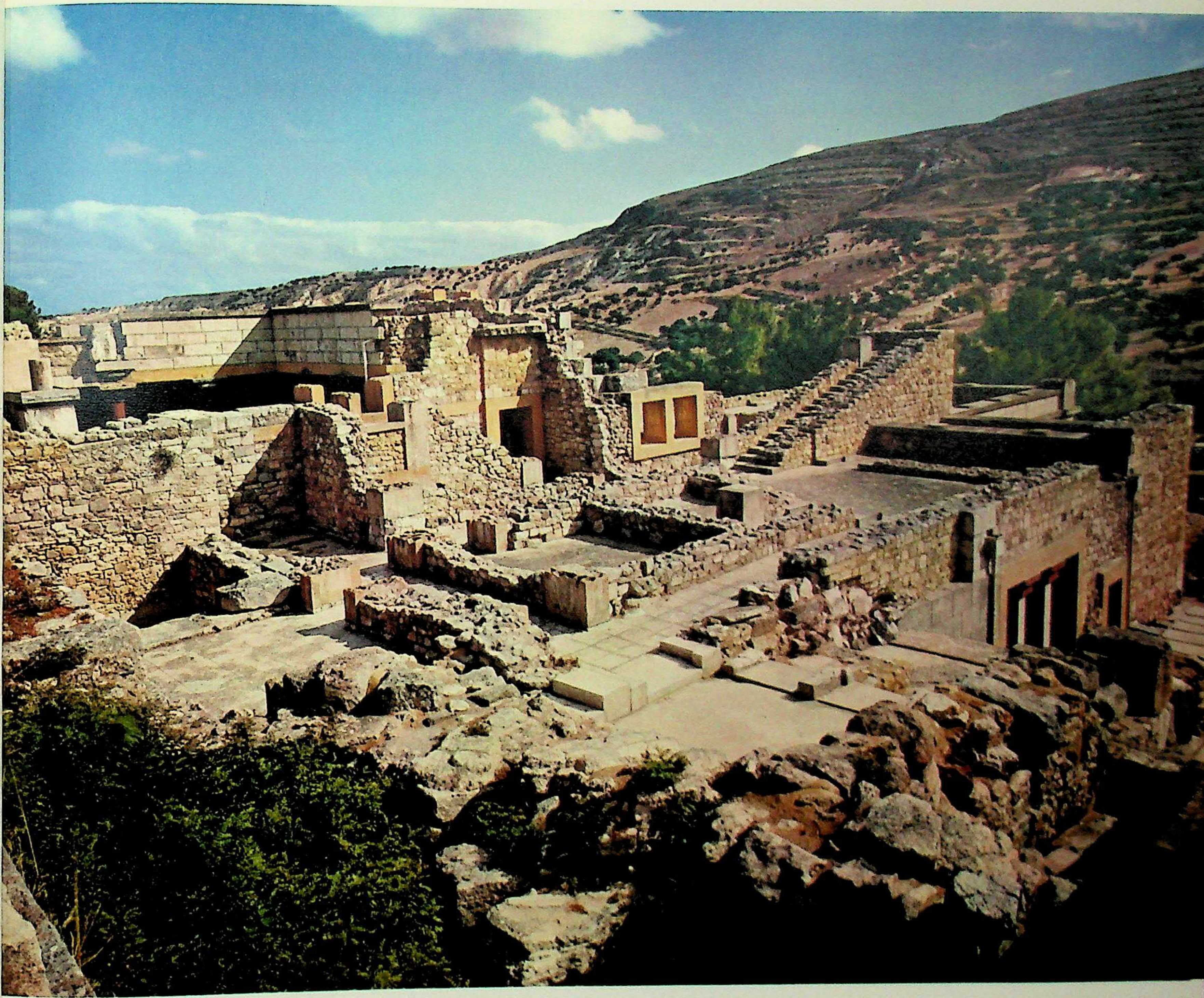
But that is not the sole tradition. The Cretan legendary cycle has come down to us in several different forms. The first episode in the cycle is the Rape of Europa. On the shores of Sidon Zeus appears, in the shape of a bull, to Agenor's daughter. He abducts her by swimming with her on his back to Crete. There he assumes human form again, and lies with her. Her first-born was Minos; later came two other sons, Sarpedon and Rhadamanthus. The ruling king adopted them and when he died Minos reigned in his stead.

Pasiphae, the daughter of the Sun, bore her husband, Minos, many children. But she also allowed herself to be seduced by a bull and bore a monster—Minotaurus, with a man's body and a bull's head. Humiliated, Minos had Daedalus, an Athenian architect attached to his court, build a marvellous palace so intricately devised that the Minotaur, once inside, could not find his way out. This was the fabled Labyrinth.

This episode connects up with another, which assumed great significance in the Attic tragedy. According to the legend, Minos subjugated the Athenians and demanded of their king, Aegeus, that every nine years he should send to Knossos seven youths and seven maidens. These were thrown to the Minotaur as fodder. When the time came for the third sacrifice, Theseus, the son of Aegeus, sailed with the ship as a member of the party. He planned to free the Athenians from the ignominy of this regular tribute. Theseus made his way into the Labyrinth, killed the Minotaur with his sword, and, guided by a thread given to him by Minos' daughter Ariadne, he managed to find his way out again.

The sequel is familiar. How Theseus escaped and snatched Ariadne away to his ship, but deserted her on the island of Naxos, where she was rescued by Dionysus. From Naxos, Theseus sailed on towards Attica,

Palace of Knossos, east wing, first storey	45
Palace of Knossos, with Mount Iuktas beyond	46



where, high on the cliffs of Cape Sunium, his father Aegeus was scanning the horizon. Seeing that the sail was black, and believing his son dead, he cast himself into the sea that still bears his name—the Aegean. For Theseus had forgotten to hoist the white sail, the pre-arranged signal of a joyful homecoming.

The final episode of the Cretan legend concerns Daedalus. Angered by the breaching of the Labyrinth, Minos decided to punish its architect, and threw him into prison. But Daedalus made wings for himself and for his son Icarus, and so they were able to escape. Forgetting his father's warning, Icarus flew too near the sun, which melted the wax with which his wings were attached; he plunged into the sea not far from Samos. Daedalus found his way to Italy, and from there reached Sicily. The time came when Minos discovered him there, but Daedalus contrived the king's death by cunning. Minos was transported to Hades, where he was appointed a judge of the dead, together with his brother Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus, the pious king of Aegina.

These legends are heterogeneous. They arose out of a long process of elaboration and clearly come into conflict with the tradition which asserted that Minos was a powerful, wise and righteous king. It is quite evident that this tradition is Cretan, and that the anti-Minoan one is Attic and gives full scope to the national pride of the Athenians. In order to glorify Theseus, the Attic tragic poets disparaged Minos. They invented a thousand details which, by stressing the horror of the tribute and the cruelty of Minos, made the fate of the seven Athenian youths and seven maidens all the more pitiful, and Theseus' courage all the greater. The ancient writers were themselves uneasy about this dual tradition, and noticed the contradictions. Ephorus, a fourth-century historian, attributes the anti-Minoan version to 'Poets who wrote tragedies concerning the Minotaur'. Aristotle refuses to believe that the young Athenians were thrown to the monster for fodder. He prefers to conjecture that they grew old on Crete, where they had to work for their living. Philochorus, a third-century historian, is of the opinion that they were used as servants in the Labyrinth. The author of

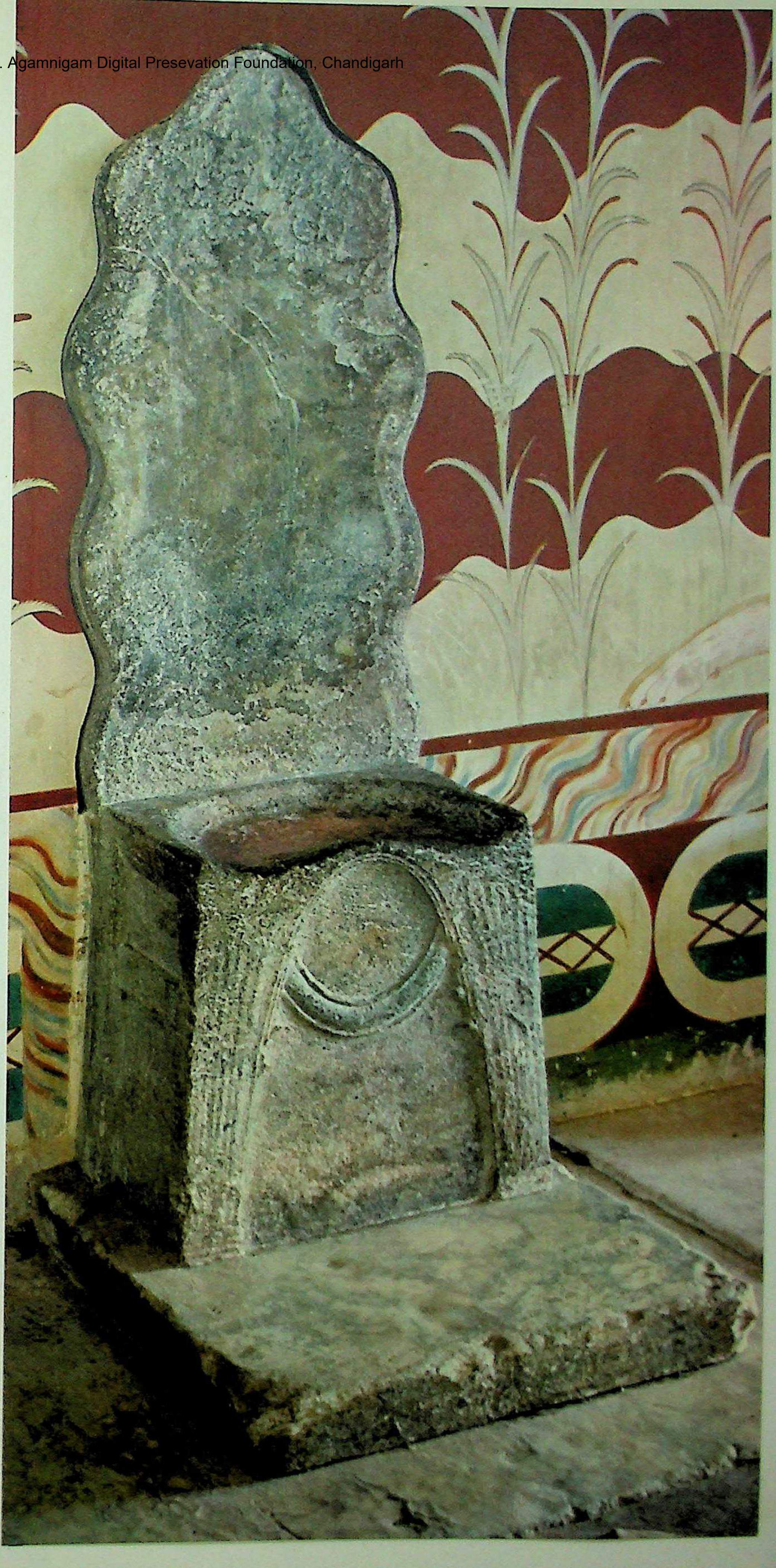
47 Ante-chamber of the Throne Room, Knossos

48 Portico of the north entrance

a little dialogue called 'Minos', long attributed to Plato, is indignant at the malicious distortion of all the traits of the wise and pious Cretan king, the famous law-giver and irreproachable judge. Plutarch analyses both traditions critically, and then concludes, 'The tragedians remain the victors. From the stage, they showered Minos with the contempt due to a hard and cruel man. And yet we are told elsewhere that he was a king and law-giver; it is added that Rhadamanthus watched over the laws he had laid down, and complied with them when dispensing justice.'

Theseus, the Labyrinth, the Minotaur, Ariadne—these themes were favoured not only by the tragic poets, but also by the Attic vase painters. They never tired of depicting the battle between the valiant Athenian and the Cretan monster. It was also recorded by sculptors on the metopes and friezes of the temples. Behind these legends that inspired the tragic poets certainly lie far-off historical memories. Early Attica must have been dependent on Knossos for a time, later throwing off the yoke.

The Labyrinth is instantly recognizable in the confusing structure of the palace laid bare by Evans. And within this frame of the Cretan legend cycle, even the Minotaur is nothing extraordinary, for the bull is, in a sense, ubiquitous in Knossos. It is likely that the double axe, most familiar of all Minoan symbols, was the weapon with which the bull was sacrificed. The Cretan word for a double axe is 'labrys'—a form which recurs in 'Labyrinth', whose original meaning is possibly 'Palace of the Double Axe'. On several Minoan finds, the best example being a seal discovered in the sacred cave of Psychro, the Minotaur is depicted in a way that can easily be interpreted as a king or priest wearing a bull-mask and engaged in a ritual dance. We have seen in what contradictory forms the Greeks had handed down the memory of Minos. Until the beginning of this century we had nothing to go by but these legends, with all their improbabilities. Thanks to Evans' excavations at Knossos, we now have at our disposal a wealth of documentation. Difficult as much of it is to interpret, it does give us a historical picture of the Minoan kingdom.



Throne in the palace of Knossos

Everything points to the fact that 'Minos' was not the name of an individual king, but a ruler's title, like Pharaoh or Caesar. Both the 'Parian Marble' and Diodorus Siculus mention two 'Minos'. It is generally accepted that the picture that emerges from the archaeological discoveries is not that of one specific ruler, but of the king of Knossos as a generic concept.

At the beginning of the second millennium, this king ruled over only a part of the island. Other kings, kinglets and princes led an independent existence at Phaistos and Mallia, at Tylissos and perhaps at Gournia, and eastern Crete had retained its own institutions. Gradually, however, the king of Knossos established his hegemony over them.

From the harbour of Amnisos, some two and a half miles from his palace, he sent his ships to open up the entire Aegean Sea, and to trade with Asia and Egypt. We are not certain whether the Cyclades and the Greek mainland were also under his dominion. And yet, as we know, there lies within the story of Theseus and the Minotaur the persistent legend of a tribute-paying Attica, compelled by force to offer up to Knossos the flower of its youth. And Herodotus and Thucydides refer somewhat grandiloquently to Cretan thalassocracy. Minos' fleet, they state, controlled the Aegean Sea; piracy ceased; the Cyclades were colonized. It was a period of great prosperity. The extent of the influence and prestige of Knossos is shown by the fact that places named after Minos are found not only in Crete, but also on Paros, Amorgos, Siphnos, Delos; in Laconia and Megaris, on Corfu and in Sicily. Whatever political form the Minoan empire may have taken, its existence cannot be doubted. The civilizing influence of Crete was considerable.

The hub of this vast empire was the palace of Knossos. This was at once Minos' residence, his seat of government, and a shrine for the celebration of the religious rites which he conducted.

The plan of the palace (p. 12) appears at first glance thoroughly confusing and complex. It covers an area of about six acres. There is a succession of halls, living-rooms, magazines, corridors, passages, stairways,

'Theatre' at Knossos 53

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courtyards, light-shafts and terraces, two floors high in some parts, higher in others. From outside, this enormous, irregular four-sided building must have conveyed an impression of solidity, and, at the same time, of movement. Contrasting planes and perspectives and the sheer complexity of doors, loggias, windows and monumental flights of steps would lend animation to the long façades. Elsewhere, defence walls gave them a rather stern, military appearance.

But the real splendour of the palace lay within. All the buildings were set about a huge inner court measuring about 30 yards by 50.

On the east side of this court were the living-quarters. This part of the palace, which was several storeys high, contained the private rooms of the king, the queen, the royal princes and their staff of servants, who lived in an atmosphere of elegance and luxury which we shall shortly examine.

Across the court, on its west side, were the state rooms, and those used for the king's public functions, both civil and religious. The Throne Room, rebuilt about 1450 B.C., is decorated with rather cold yet highly decorative frescoes in the stilted style of the period. Griffins recline among lilies—which flower seems to have been a symbol of Cretan royalty. The throne itself, which is of stone carved so as to look like wood, is preserved in its entirety (p. 51). All round the walls are benches—presumably for the king's counsellors. Facing the throne are a few steps leading down into a small chamber surrounded by a balustrade, which may have served some religious purpose. Some experts think it was a pit for the sacred snakes; others take it to have been a lustral chamber.

Also on the west side of the court stood a shrine bearing the votive horns, which, as we shall see, was probably used in the cult of the Great Goddess.

In this court, too, it is thought that the king carried out the sacrifice of the bulls—a rite which probably played an important role in the religious life of the palace, consecrating the monarch's power.

54 The 'Priest-King' relief, palace of Knossos, LM I

Other parts of the building, comprising countless rooms, served as administrative offices. One very important discovery was that of two archive rooms, containing, in chests made of gypsum or wood, hundreds of clay tablets inscribed with Linear A script. Although these cannot yet be read, we do possess enough comparative material to support the contention that these texts are of the same type as those of the fifteenth century B.C. written in Linear B and composed in Greek, which we have been able to decipher. The Minoan tablets are evidently inventories, accounts, conscription rolls, work-lists and lists of dues and levies. Many of these pieces bear the king's seal, or that of some high-ranking official. These archives indicate that for administrative purposes Minos had scribes at his disposal who, if they did not live in the palace, at least worked there.

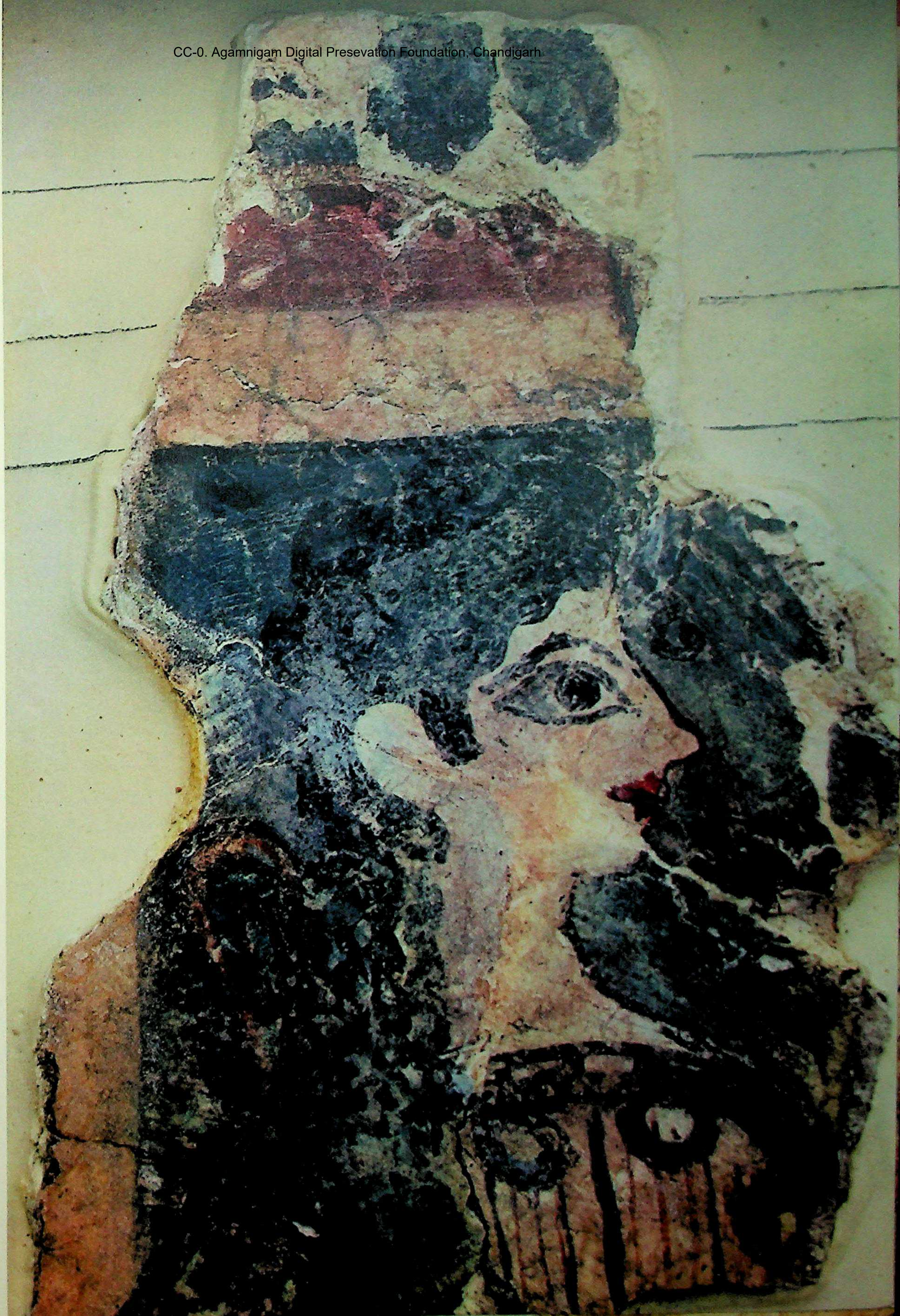
The western end of the palace consisted mainly of magazines connected by a long corridor. There stood rows of *pithoi*, or earthenware storage jars, holding produce of all kinds. Underground chambers, which could be closed over with stone slabs, contained foodstuffs as well as hoards of bronze, ivory, valuable varieties of wood, metal vases, ornaments and fabrics—in fact the king's treasure, for in these magazines no distinction was made between the royal possessions and those of the state, as is always the case at this stage of civilization.

Minos employed large numbers of artists and craftsmen in his palace. They decorated the halls with wall paintings; they wrought, shaped, cast or incised the vases, the seals, the statuettes, the pottery, the gaming tables, the jewellery, and all the objects with which the king—who obviously cared deeply for fine things—surrounded himself. These must also have included rich fabrics and ceremonial robes; of the wooden furniture, only a few metal handles and fittings survive to tell it once existed.

Nor must we forget the musicians, dancing-girls and acrobats—all, quite possibly, living within the palace. Minos' cellars contained sufficient corn, oil, wine and clothes to feed and clothe the countless inhabitants

'La Parisienne', fresco at Knossos, LM I 57

Inner court with peristyle in the King's apartments 58



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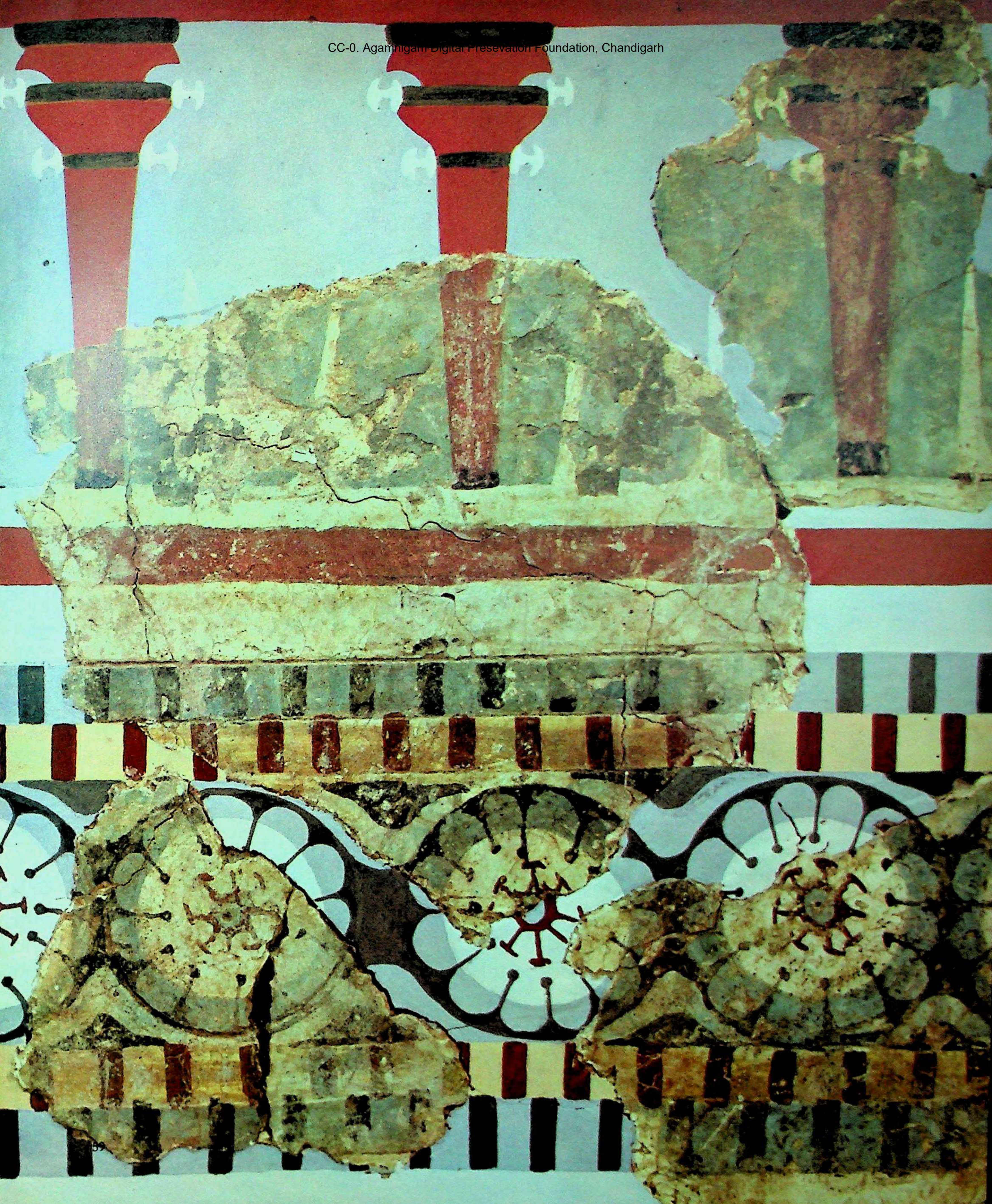

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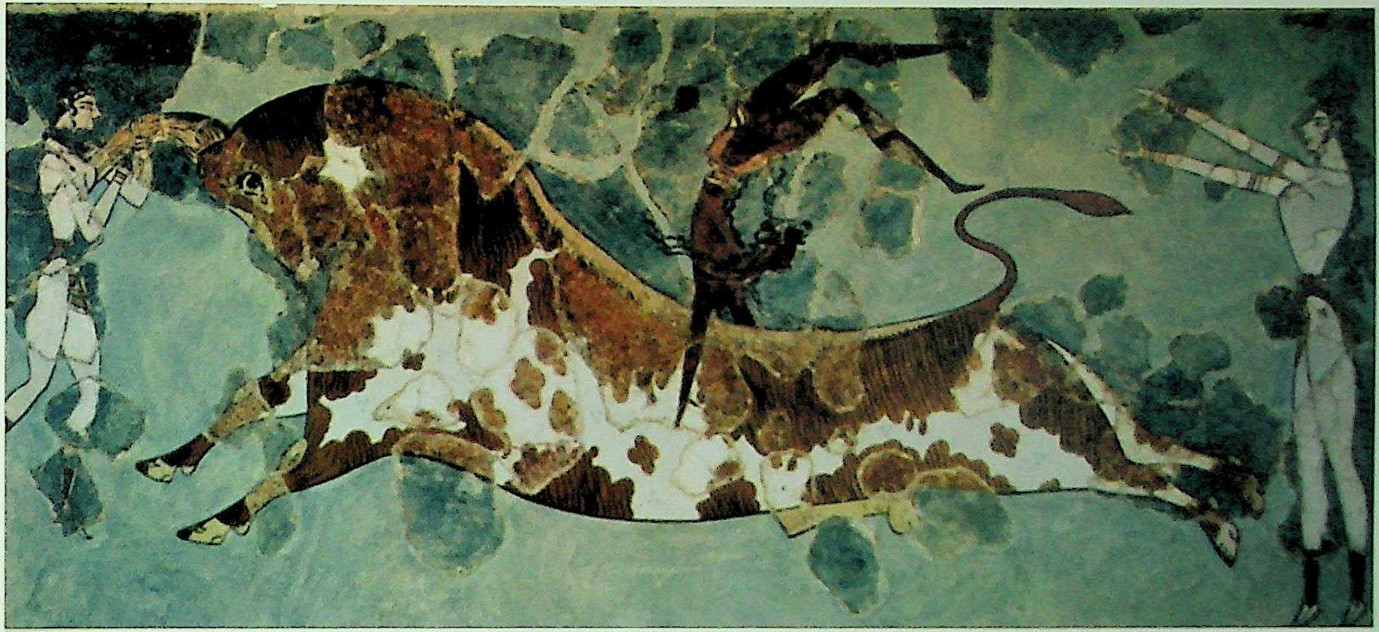


Bull-leaping, fresco from Knossos, LM II

of the palace—servants, scribes, officials, artists, craftsmen, musicians and acrobats.

The archaeologists have enabled us to form a fairly accurate picture of Minos' court at the height of its splendour, and to visualize this great palace alive with colour and movement. It is a picture of capable administration and orderliness, as well as cultured elegance; a picture which confirms the reputation for power, wisdom and justice that the Minoan king left behind him.

59 Architectural painting, fresco at Knossos, MM III

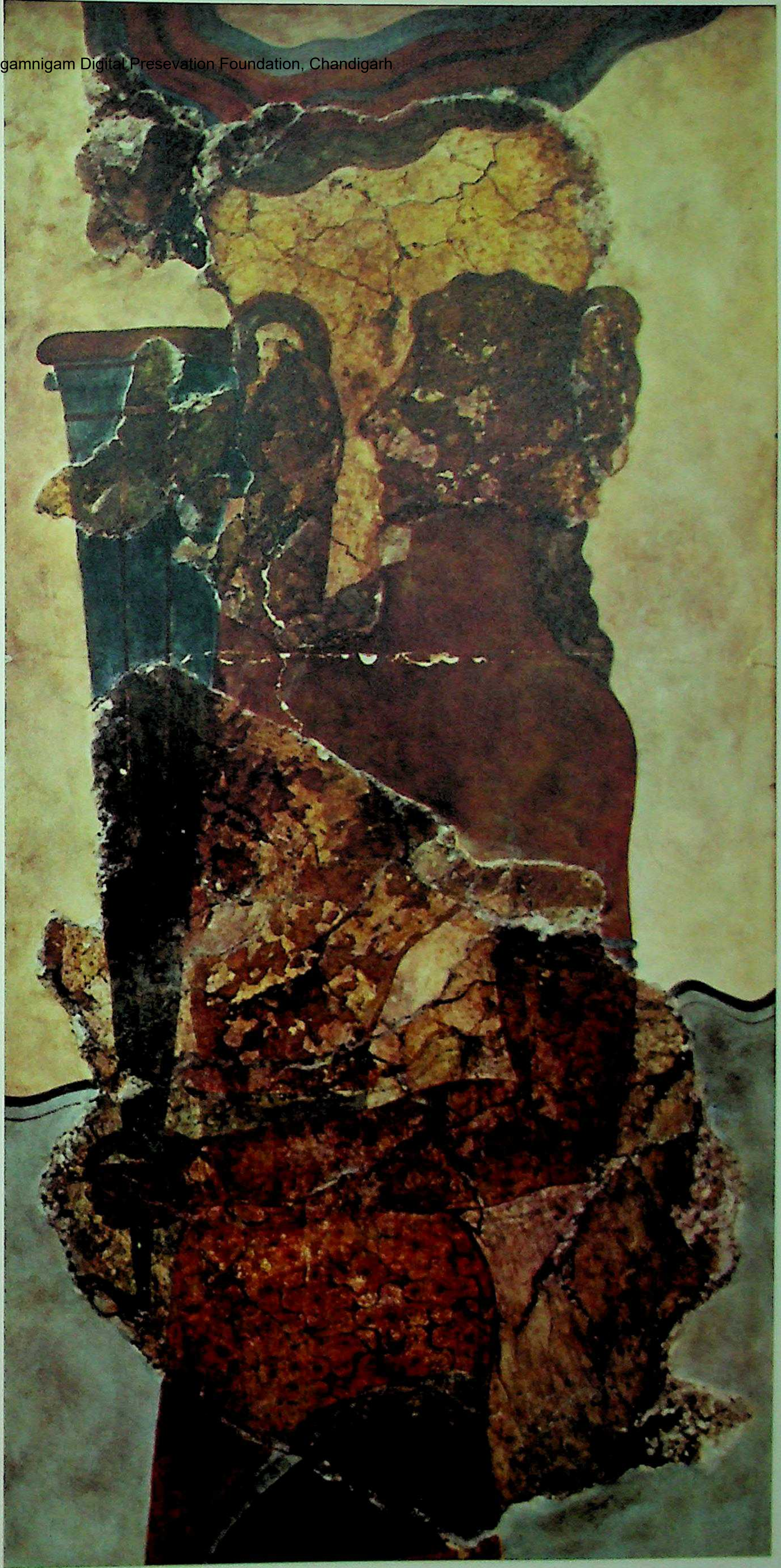
60 Attacking bull. Shallow relief, portico of the north entrance, LM I

THE LORDLY LIFE

Everyday life, centred in this palace, was astonishingly lively and brilliant—as examination of the paintings and frescoes will show—and the royal family must have lived very comfortably in its residential quarters. The flight of stairs, since reconstructed by Evans, led into a large, light hall. The fine wooden pillars that supported the ceiling have disappeared, but it was possible to locate their original positions, so that they could be replaced with pillars of painted cement. They appear so often in frescoes (p. 59) and other pictures that there is no likelihood of error in the reconstruction. Living-rooms and bedchambers were beautifully decorated. The lighting diffused through light-shafts has an intimate warmth. The excavators found a water closet, complete with flush, and bathrooms, the best known being that of the queen. It was fitted into what must have originally been a bedroom, since there is neither a water supply nor a waste pipe. The walls were faced with large gypsum slabs surmounted by a frieze. One bath-tub was discovered still in place (p. 13). The 'Snake Goddess' statuettes (pp. 77 and 79) give us an idea of the beauty of the women's costumes. Fragments of a chessboard suggest that the sovereign was not averse to pastimes.

Around the palace stood the dwellings of the high dignitaries. These were often villas decorated with magnificent frescoes (p. 109), suggesting a very high level of culture and material luxury. Their occupiers probably went daily to the palace to carry out their official duties or to share the king's pleasures. One of these men had a ship reproduced on his seal, which prompted Glotz to identify him as the Minister for the Navy. Another seal bore an ear of corn; its owner may have been Overseer of the King's Provender. The lioness on a third seal might well have been the symbol of the Minister for War.

Rhyton-bearer, fresco from Knossos, LM I 63



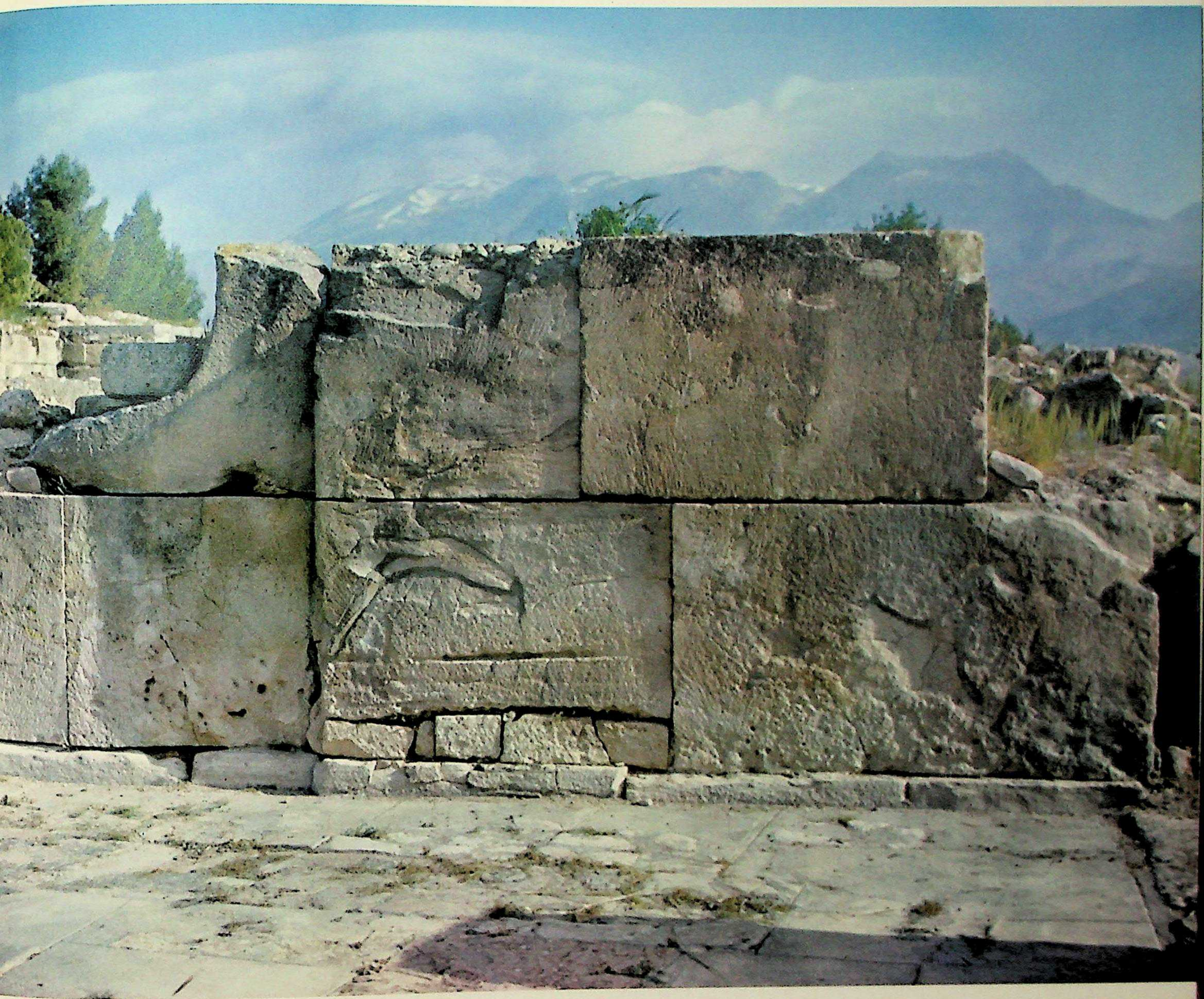
War? One of the most remarkable features of Minoan civilization was the fact that it was so peaceable. Surrounded by the sea, of which they were masters, the Cretans enjoyed security on their island. From the moment that the local princes acknowledged the supremacy of Knossos, the endemic wars that had existed through the previous centuries came to an end.

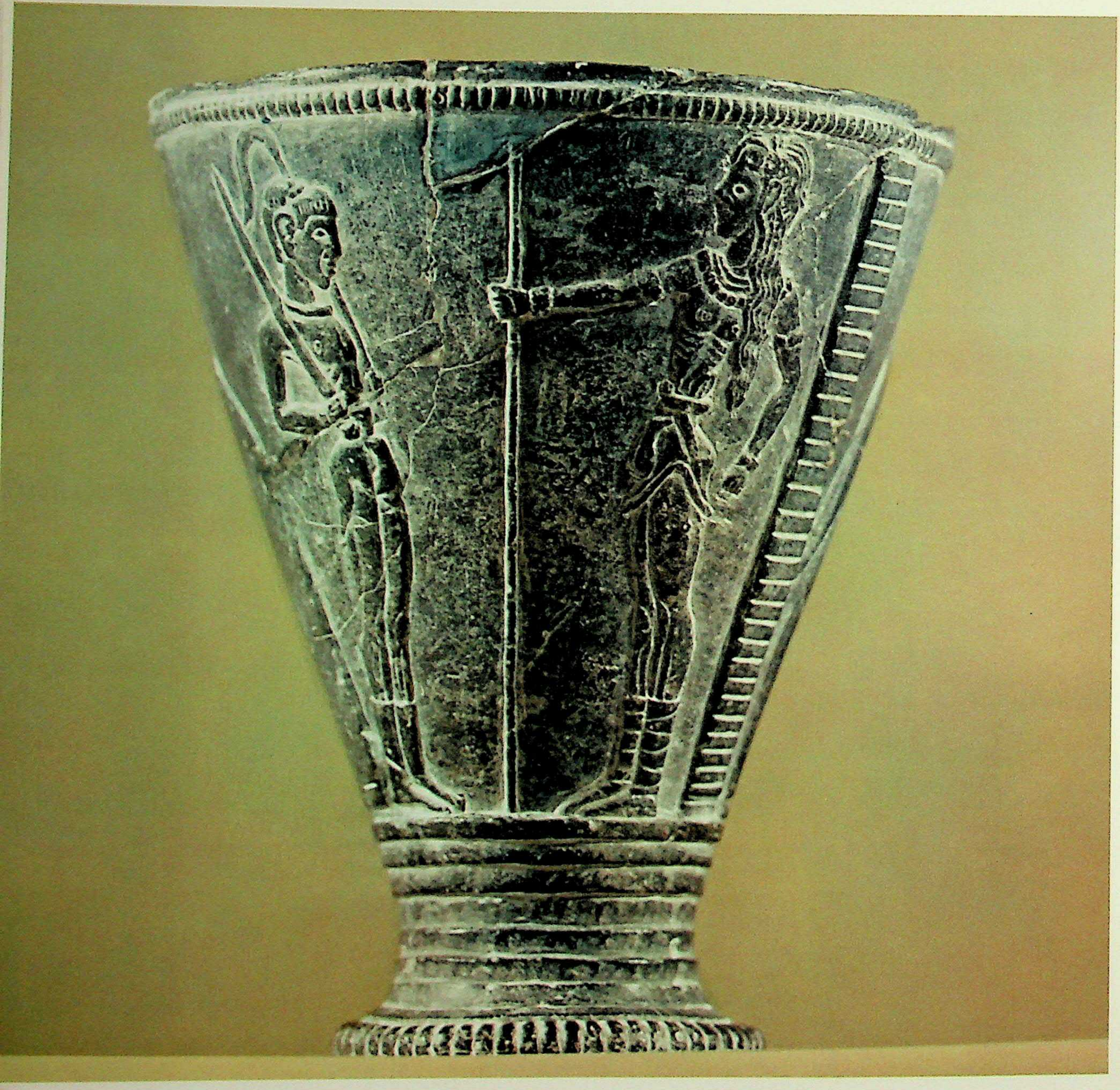
Certainly, the Cretans had an army. One of the steatite vases from Hagia Triada shows a prince or a high official receiving honours from an officer and his men (p. 66). The officer, wearing a helmet, is presenting his sword; the soldiers (not visible in our picture) are almost hidden by their large oxhide shields. Other documents provide further proof of the existence of Minoan warriors. Countless daggers and swords were found in excavated graves, and shields often appear, both as a decorative motif and, perhaps too, as a religious symbol. All the same, actual battle-scenes are exceptional in Cretan art, for Minos does not stand out as a warrior-hero desirous of being remembered by posterity for his victories. In his palace, peace reigns; luxury, beauty and gaiety prevail. Mycenae offers a very different picture in this respect. Its king is a warrior chieftain. The palace is confined within a cyclopean fortress. His artists enjoy depicting scenes of siege: soldiers, chariots and armed horsemen springing to mount their steeds. Thus it was only to be expected that, once the Achaeans had established a fleet and could cross the Aegean, they would eventually overrun the peaceable island of Crete.

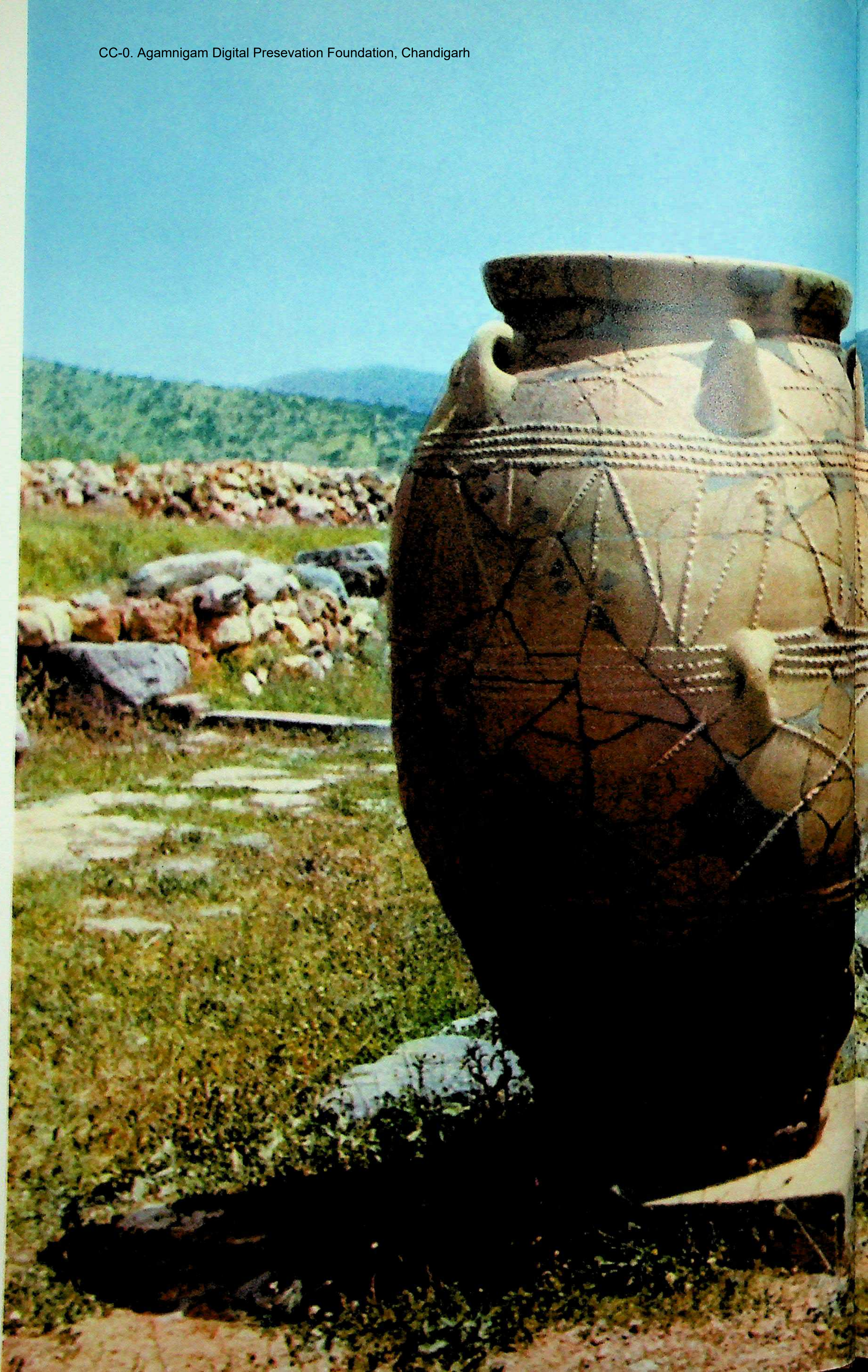
Instead of battle-scenes, the frescoes of Knossos portray brilliant festivities. In the great court, or upon the steps overlooking a paved forecourt at the palace entrance, forming a kind of theatre (pp. 53, 70), scores of guests would assemble, the ladies wearing their most splendid robes and cosmetics. A likeness of one of these ladies has come down to us on a fresco fragment. When it was first rediscovered, her perky, elegant appearance caused such surprise that she was dubbed 'La Parisienne' (p. 57).

For great occasions, the king and his noblemen adorned themselves with sober elegance. We can get some

Palace ruins of Phaistos, with Mount Ida in the background		65
Officer presenting arms	Steatite vase from Hagia Triada, LM I	66
Bull-leaper between the horns of a bull	Steatite rhyton from Hagia Triada, LM I	67







idea of the graceful appearance from a larger-than-lifesize plaster relief—the famous 'Priest-King' relief, which decorated a pillared hall on the south side of the great court (p. 54). Just as noble in appearance were the bearers of the votive offerings as they advanced towards the altar (p. 86).

The Greek games in Delphi, at the Isthmus and in Nemea appear to have derived from those of Crete and Mycenae, which they succeeded. Dancing, music and possibly also poetry were held in great esteem, and the Minoans possessed several musical instruments: zither, sistrum, cymbal, double flute, syrinx and trumpet. The Greeks kept the Cretan names for most of these instruments.

Athletic prowess was also admired, as is shown by a steatite vase from Hagia Triada, on which boxers in action are depicted in great detail. But the sport which appealed most of all to the Minoans was that of bull-leaping. The bulls were not killed, as in Spain, but used in a display of acrobatic agility, which probably took place by the sanctuaries before the sacrificial celebrations. Figurines found in the tholos tombs in the plain of Messara show that the traditions of bull-sports went back as far as the end of the third millennium B.C., by which time it had already become a traditional subject for artists (p. 124). The leaper would approach the animal; as it lowered its head to charge, he would make a dive for its horns, his aim being either to grip them with his hands or legs, or else to swing himself on to the bull's back in daredevil jumps, as demonstrated by a fresco (p. 61) and a graceful ivory statuette (p. 72). The acrobats enjoyed the challenge which the bull's brute strength offered to their athletic skill. Yet another steatite vase from Hagia Triada shows one of these bull-leapers performing an incredibly daring feat; his legs grip the bull's horns and his shoulders are braced against its muzzle, while the animal rears up and throws back its head in an attempt to rid itself of its enraging burden (p. 67).

This lordly life was not confined to Knossos. In the other palaces, too, above all in Mallia and Phaistos, independent rulers, later to become Minos' vassals, lived in surroundings of pomp and wealth. The great

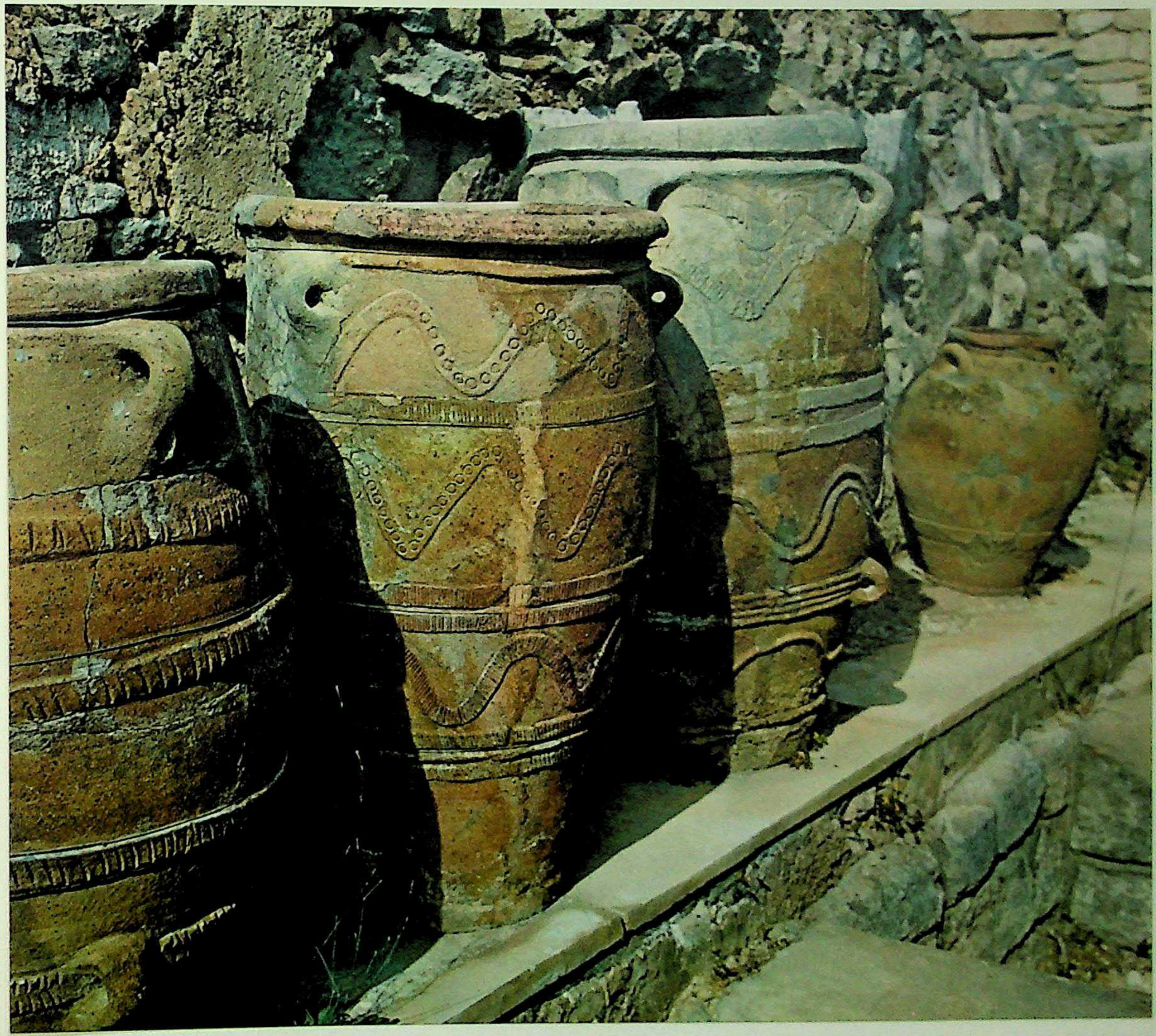
68/69 *Pithoi* (storage jars) in the ruins of Mallia

70 'Theatre' at Knossos, facing south-east

71 Ruins of Hagia Triada 72 Bull-leaper, ivory figure from Knossos, LM I

courtyard of Phaistos and the tiers ranged round its arena actually outshine the court and theatre of Knossos. Its masonry is more carefully dressed (p. 65).

The little towns of Gournia, virtually a Minoan Pompeii, and Palaikastro, which have been systematically explored, give further proof that all Crete was prosperous and enjoyed a high standard of living under Minoan rule. It is true that these settlements consisted mainly of officials, craftsmen and traders, as did the residential quarters of Knossos, Tylissos and Mallia, and in fact only dwellings and workshops were found there. Of the peasants' way of life we know practically nothing, but Pendlebury's investigations at Karphi and on the Lassithi plateau suggest that in the true rural areas it was rough and primitive.



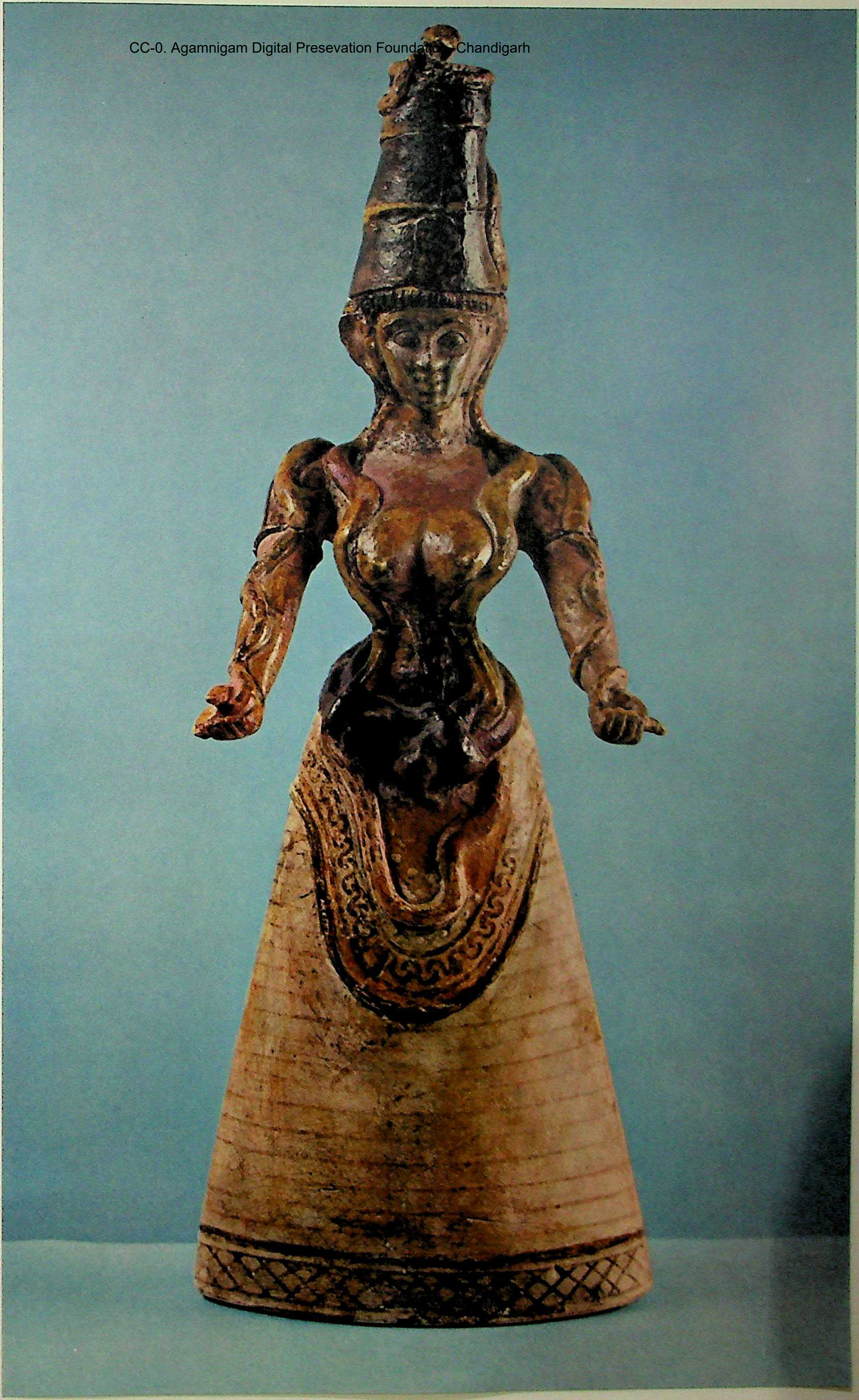
Pithoi (storage jars) in the magazines of Knossos

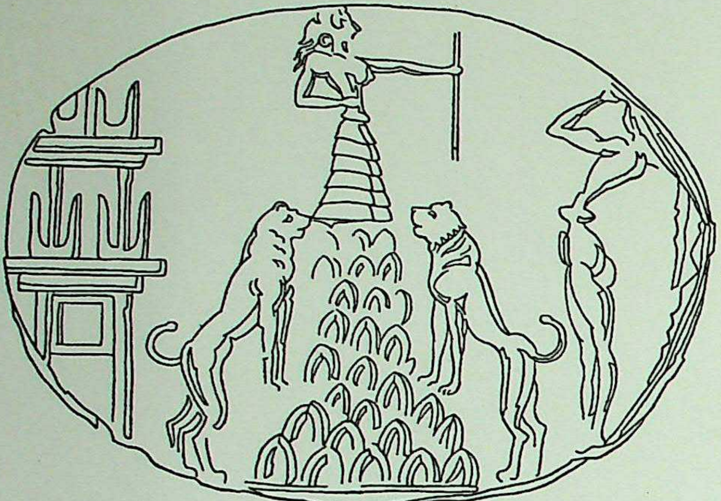
THE GREAT GODDESS

Minoan religion is dominated by one great and venerable figure: the Mother Goddess, prime source of life and fertility.

She is portrayed in many works of art which give us some idea of what she was and how she was worshipped—though much of this is a matter of conjecture, based on fortuitous and uncertain evidence. One thing is certain, though: she was omnipresent in Minoan Crete, and the entire religion was focussed upon her. The Mother Goddess is not an exclusively Cretan deity; she was venerated by many Mediterranean peoples, and, in one form or another, her cult runs through the whole of Antiquity. She is the Cybele of Pessinus who reigned over Phrygian souls, the Lady of Paphos on Cyprus, and the great Artemis of the Ephesians, whose followers trembled when the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel to them. She is the dreaded Mistress of the beasts—the *Πότνια Θηρῶν* who prowled among the hills of Asia—but she is also Demeter, bestower of blessings, in whose honour the Athenians celebrated their holy mysteries twice yearly in Eleusis. Argos worshipped her under the name of Hera, and it was to her that the people of Paestum erected temples which are still admired today. Her cult had its holy places at the foot of volcanic cliffs in Locri Epizephyri, in a deep crevasse in Agrigentum and—still further west—in Selinunte, at the bottom of a valley. From central Anatolia to the shores of Italy, the deep places of the earth were pregnant with the awesome divinity of the goddess who was revered as mother of fertility, and who bade the corn produce its life-sustaining harvests. It would be rash to say that the goddess was everywhere the same deity. She appeared in different guises, varying with place and with time, and her cult varied accordingly. And yet intuition insists that behind the

'Snake Goddess', faience statuette from Knossos, MM III 77





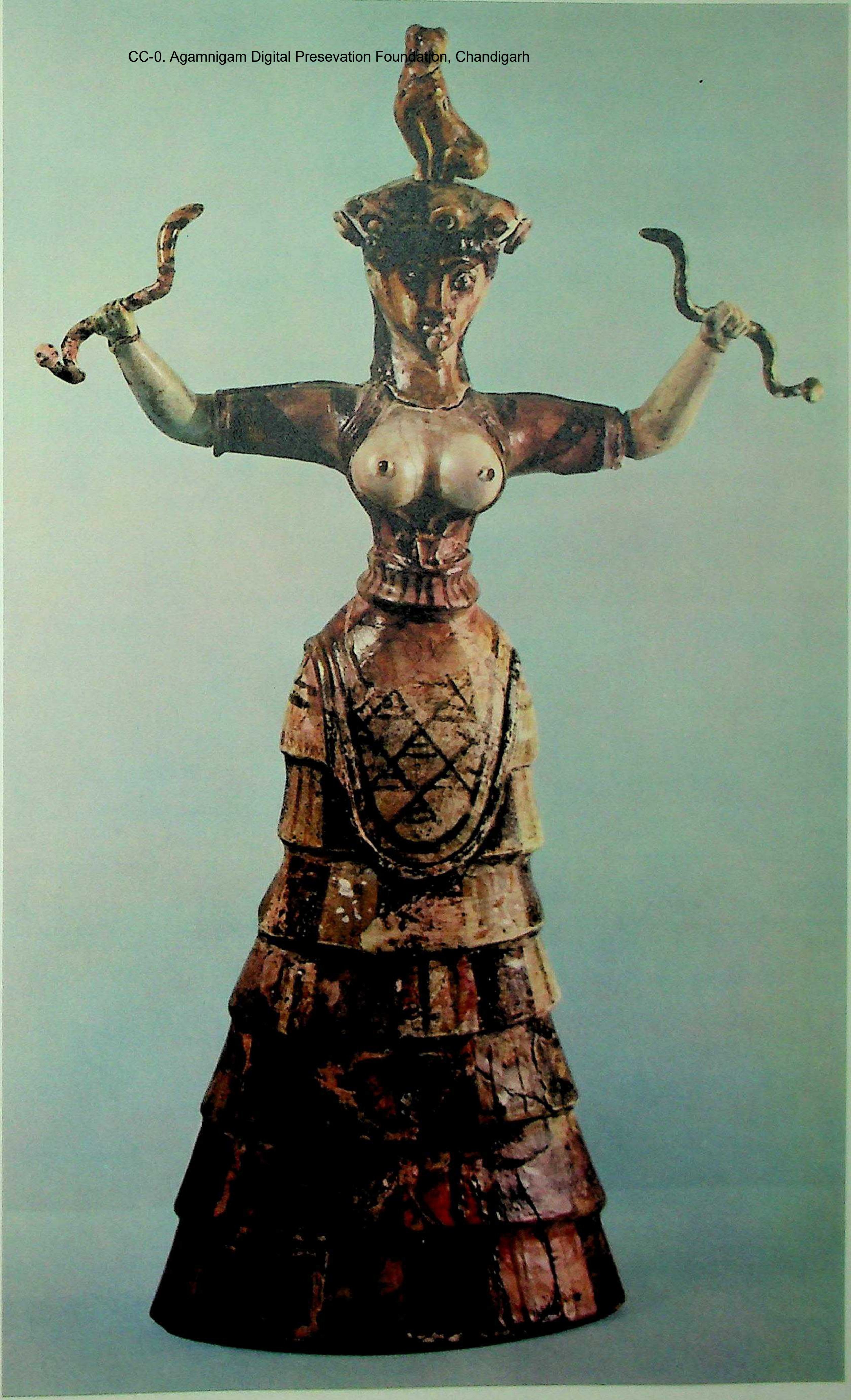
Appearance of a goddess (seal from Knossos)

myriad names, holy places and rites, the same primal being is present. From the earliest times, the cult of the Great Goddess had left its impression upon those countries in which Greek civilization was later to flower. And, now, in Minoan Crete, we have found this divinity in her pristine purity. The seal whose imprint is reproduced on this page was found in Knossos; it shows the Great Goddess amid Nature, unearthly in form and domineering, towering upon a rocky eminence flanked by two lions. A human figure starts back as from the brilliance of a dazzling light.

Two famous faience figurines also portray the goddess as we may assume men envisaged her when Knossos was at its zenith. Evans found them, together with other precious objects, in a cache beneath the shrine in the palace court (pp. 77 and 79). She is attired in much the same way as were the women who attended the religious ceremonies: a brightly-embroidered jacket which exposed the breasts, and a full, many-tiered skirt, flowing down to her feet from a tightly laced waist. There is, in fact, some doubt as to whether these figurines are representations of the goddess herself, or merely of priestesses appearing in her guise. For us, though, this has little significance; we have only to examine scenes in which the priestesses and the goddess are portrayed together to realize that, similarly adorned as they were, they looked exactly alike.

Whether goddesses or priestesses, the two statuettes share an important feature: the snakes. One of the figures brandishes two snakes, whilst snakes twine round the waist of the other one, around her neck, her arms and her tall headdress. The symbolic meaning of these creatures is more or less evident; they are the emanation of that mysterious subterranean life personified by the goddess.

'Snake Goddess', faience statuette from Knossos, MM III 79



One of the characteristic features of the Minoan religion is the absence of monumental temple structures, and the apparent absence of large cult images. There were, no doubt, shrines within the palaces; that of Knossos contained quite a number—one, in particular, alongside the great court beneath which Evans found the two figures just described. We are able to reconstruct this shrine on the strength of a fresco painting; it took the form of a shallow niche, entered through a pillared porch. There is nothing to indicate that it contained an image, but votive horns on the façade confirm the sacred character of the building—before which, as the fresco pictures it, dancing-girls are performing. This shrine, and similar ones found elsewhere, are so small that only one or two priests at most could find room in it to celebrate the prescribed rites. The palaces and many houses also contain underground crypts. Religious ceremonies were performed in the palace. The king, no doubt, took part in them, though the leading role was reserved for the women, as it was in the later cult of Dionysus. They it was who performed the sacred dances.

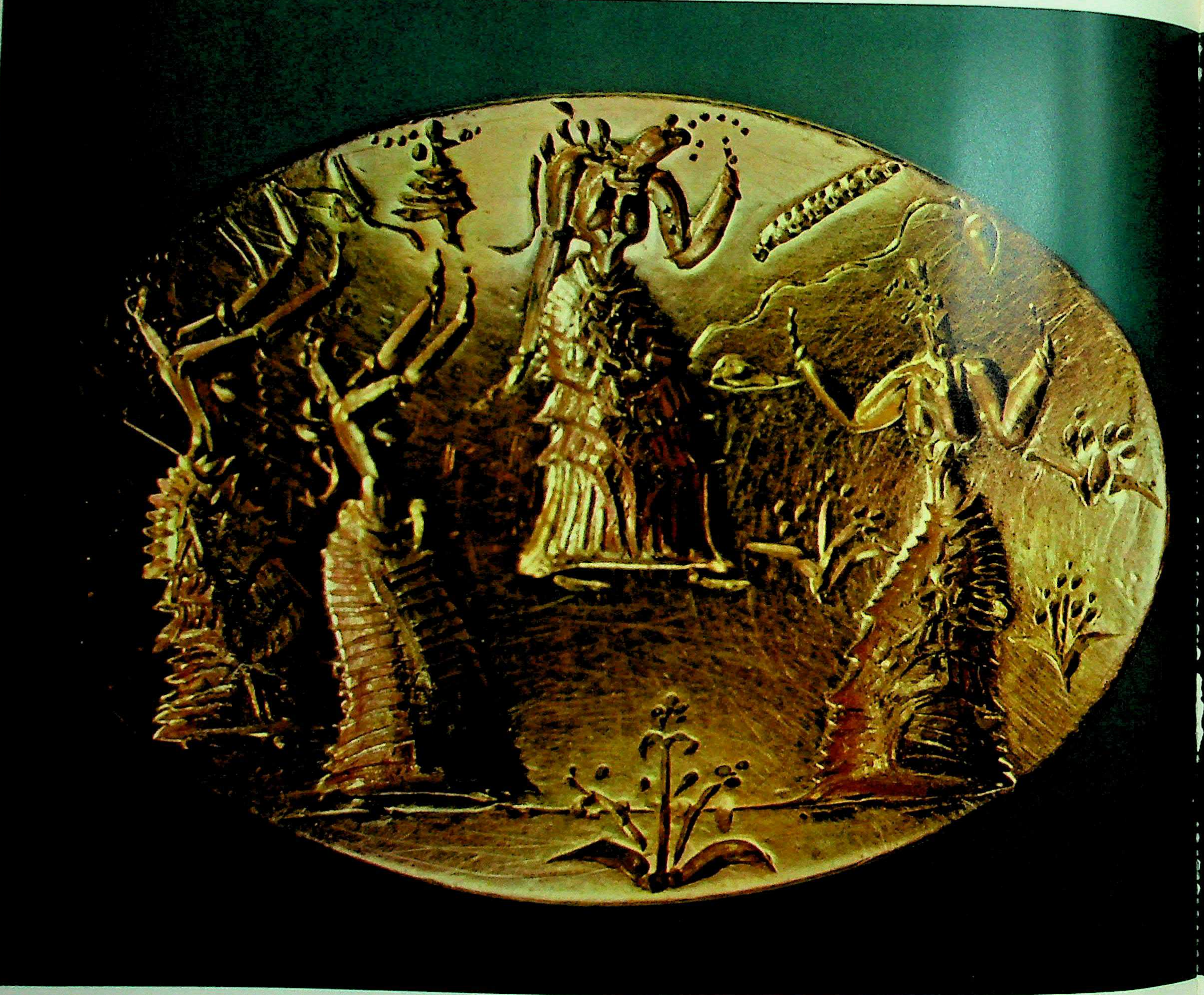
Similar, if more energetic, dances are represented on a golden seal-ring found in the royal grave of Isopata near Knossos (p. 82). On the left, two women clap their hands and throw back their heads in the manner of the later Maenads and Bacchantes. On the right, a third female figure spreads out her arms. Between them, on a higher level, appears the goddess. All four wear similar clothes and ornaments: a jacket which leaves the breasts exposed, and a wide, full-length skirt, like those of the Knossos figurines. They also wear bracelets and beaded diadems. The vehemence of their gestures and the sense of violent movement which the miniature picture conveys suggest that the dances in honour of the goddess were of an ecstatic nature. Flowering plants and a snake indicate that the ceremony is taking place in the open air.

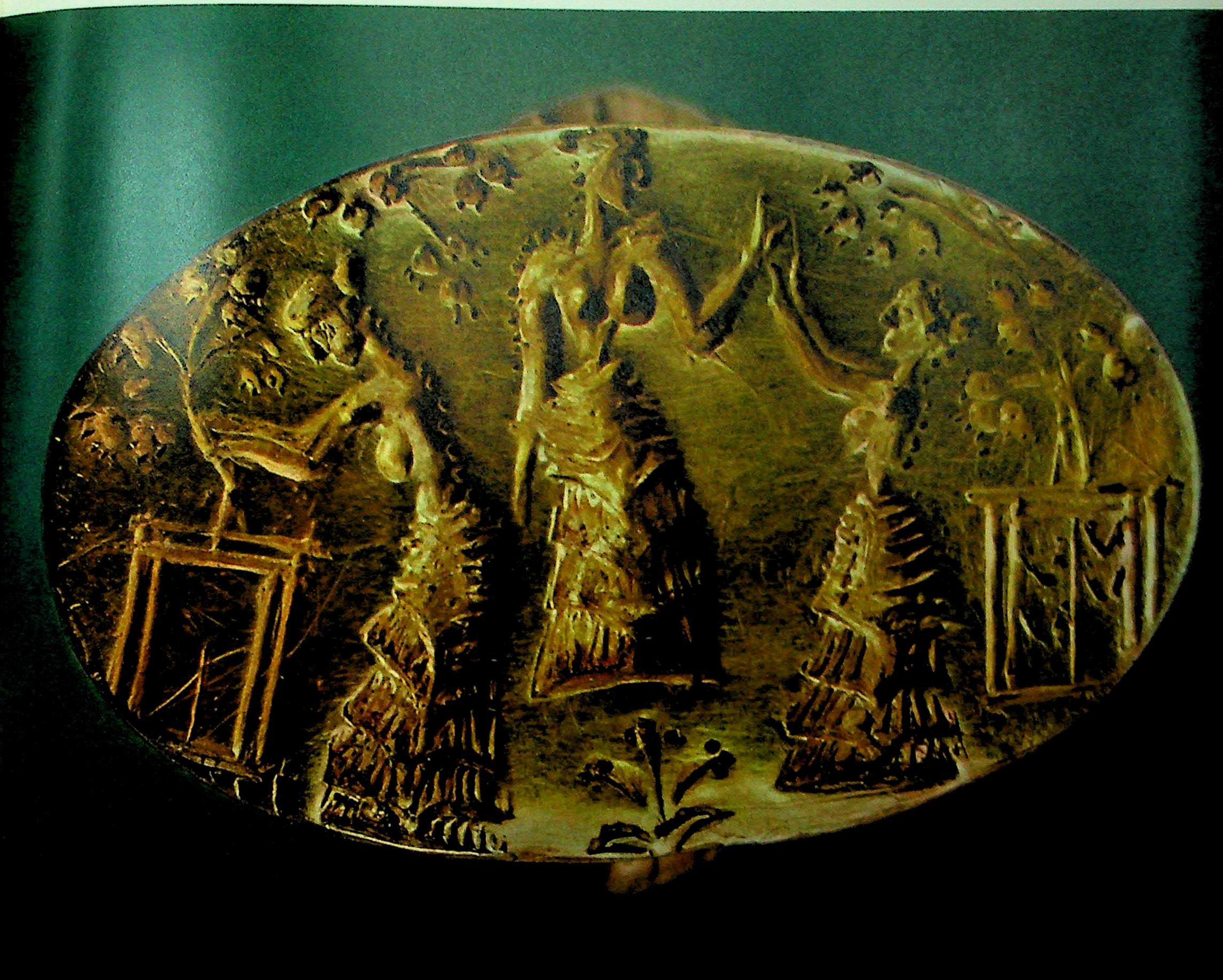
A second very similar seal-ring depicts a much calmer ritual scene. This also takes place in the open air, and appears to represent the cult of the Sacred Tree. The priestess on the left seems to be placing the tree on some kind of altar. The figure on the right, with her back to a similar altar, raises her arms in a gesture of

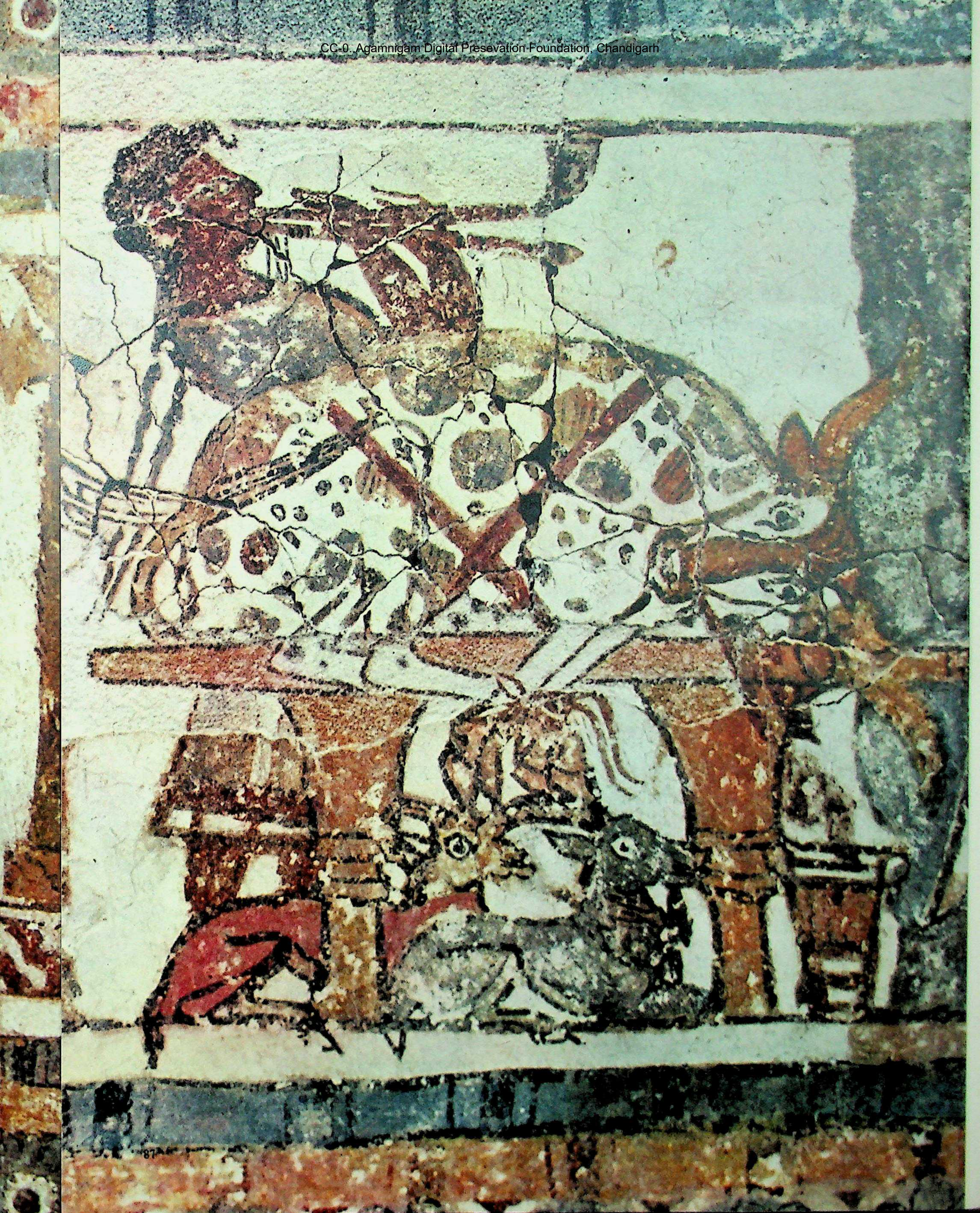
Female terracotta figurine from Piscokephalo, MM III 81

Ritual scene, bezel of gold signet ring from the royal grave at Isopata, LM III 82

Cult of the Sacred Tree, bezel of gold signet ring of unknown provenance, LM II 83



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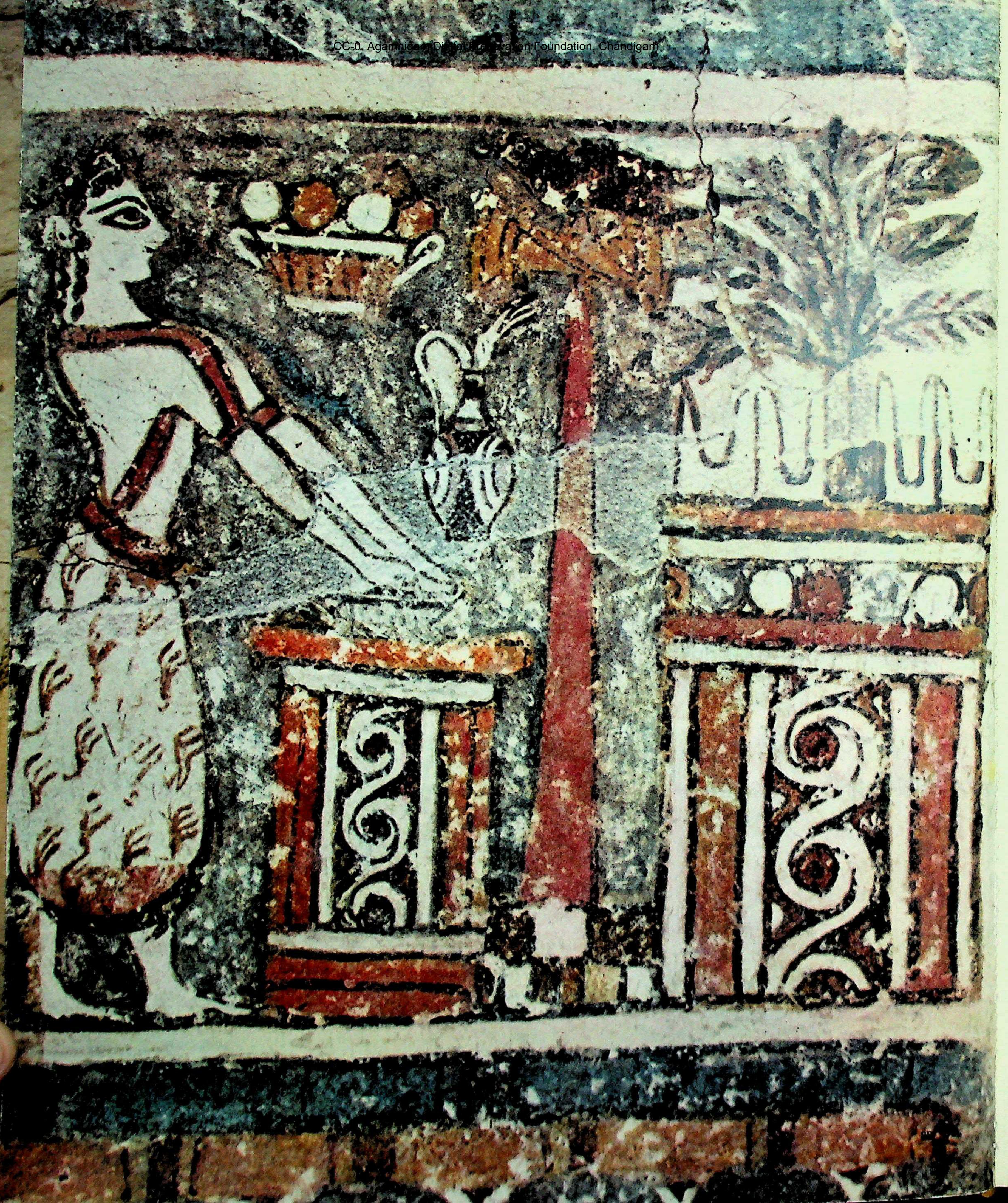


sacrifice and suppliance to the goddess, who here, too, is elevated above her attendant mortals (p. 83). This, at least, is the most plausible interpretation of these works of art. One is astonished by their beauty, by the mastery and spontaneity with which the artist has contrived to engrave, in the tiny oval of a ring, such lively, evocative religious scenes.

We learn still more about Minoan religious rites from another monument, dating from practically the same period. This is a limestone sarcophagus, decorated with paintings, which was found by Italian archaeologists in the royal villa of Hagia Triada. On its two smaller end panels are chariots, one drawn by griffins, the other by horses. The paintings on the long sides represent two different scenes. The subject of the one reproduced on pages 85 and 86 is a libation; a female figure, probably a priestess, pours the contents of a cantharus-shaped vase into a large crater. The crater is flanked on either side by pillars surmounted by the double axe, upon which birds perch. Behind the priestess comes another woman, carrying two more libation vases on a yoke. The musician who follows her is plucking the strings of a kind of zither. He wears a long robe like that of the women, but his darker skin is clearly intended to distinguish him as a man. Our picture shows only part of the rest of the sequence. The two men with their backs to the zither-player carry calves in their arms; their unusual skirt is similar to that of the priestess. These are bearers of offerings. To their right (and out of our picture) a third man holds a sickle-shaped object with which he approaches a figure standing stiffly erect in the enclosure between a tree and the door of a small building. It is generally agreed that this figure is that of the dead man before his tomb.

The other long side shows, on the left, an animal sacrifice (p. 87), and on the right, a bloodless sacrificial scene (p. 88). The bull which is being sacrificed lies on a table. Its legs are tied together; a wide red band runs twice across its body. The blood which is to act as a libation runs from its severed throat into a vessel on the ground. Beneath the sacrificial table, two cowering goats await sacrifice. Behind the bull is a musician

84 *Kernos* (sacrificial stone), palace of Mallia

85/86 Libation and offering scene, painted sarcophagus from Hagia Triada, LM II

87/88 Sacrifice and offering scene, painted sarcophagus from Hagia Triada, LM II with a double flute, who appears to be marking the rhythm of a group of stepping women (to the left of the table; not visible in the picture).

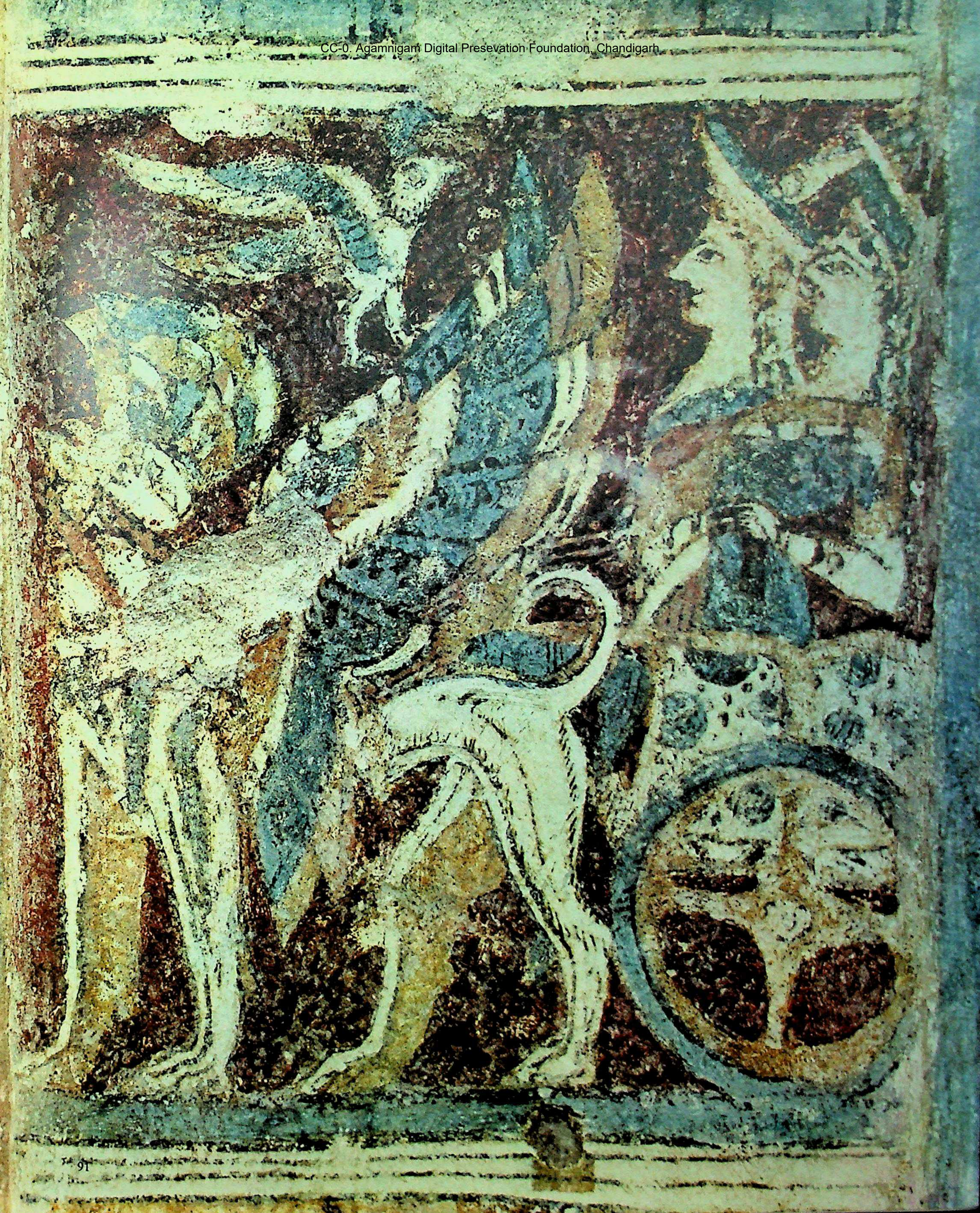
The bloodless sacrifice is easier to interpret. On the extreme right, a tree rises above a shrine surmounted by votive horns, and in front of this stands a column topped by a double axe and bird. Tree, horns, double axe and bird appear to symbolize the divine presence and to endow with divine power the sacred rites performed by the woman who stands before a small altar and offers up the first fruits of the earth: a basketful of fruit and the contents of a ewer. The woman's hands are outstretched over a shallow bowl which stands on the altar.

It is difficult to interpret these four scenes with precision, but the fact that they decorate a sarcophagus suggests an association with death and burial. Yet even this is not certain, at least as regards the two scenes last described. And even if we can describe the rites being performed, this does not imply that we have grasped their underlying significance. But certain features are common to all these frescoes. There is, in the first place, the precise and formal nature of the rites: each gesture seems to have its own meanings as though every element of the ritual is hallowed by long tradition. And that is in fact the case, for the sarcophagus of Hagia Triada belongs to a late epoch of the Minoan civilization—the fourteenth century B.C. It must, therefore, date from the time after the Achaean invasion, when the great period of creative freedom was already over.

Another interesting feature of these pictured rites is the presence of musicians. A stringed instrument accompanies the libation, a wind instrument the blood sacrifice. And it is important to remember how strictly the Greeks were later to distinguish between these two different types of instrument. The choice of flute or zither was almost certainly deliberate and had already a special significance in Minoan ritual.

Apart from the knot and the shield, it is noteworthy that all the great symbols of Cretan religion appear on

Chariot drawn by griffins, sarcophagus from Hagia Triada, LM II 91



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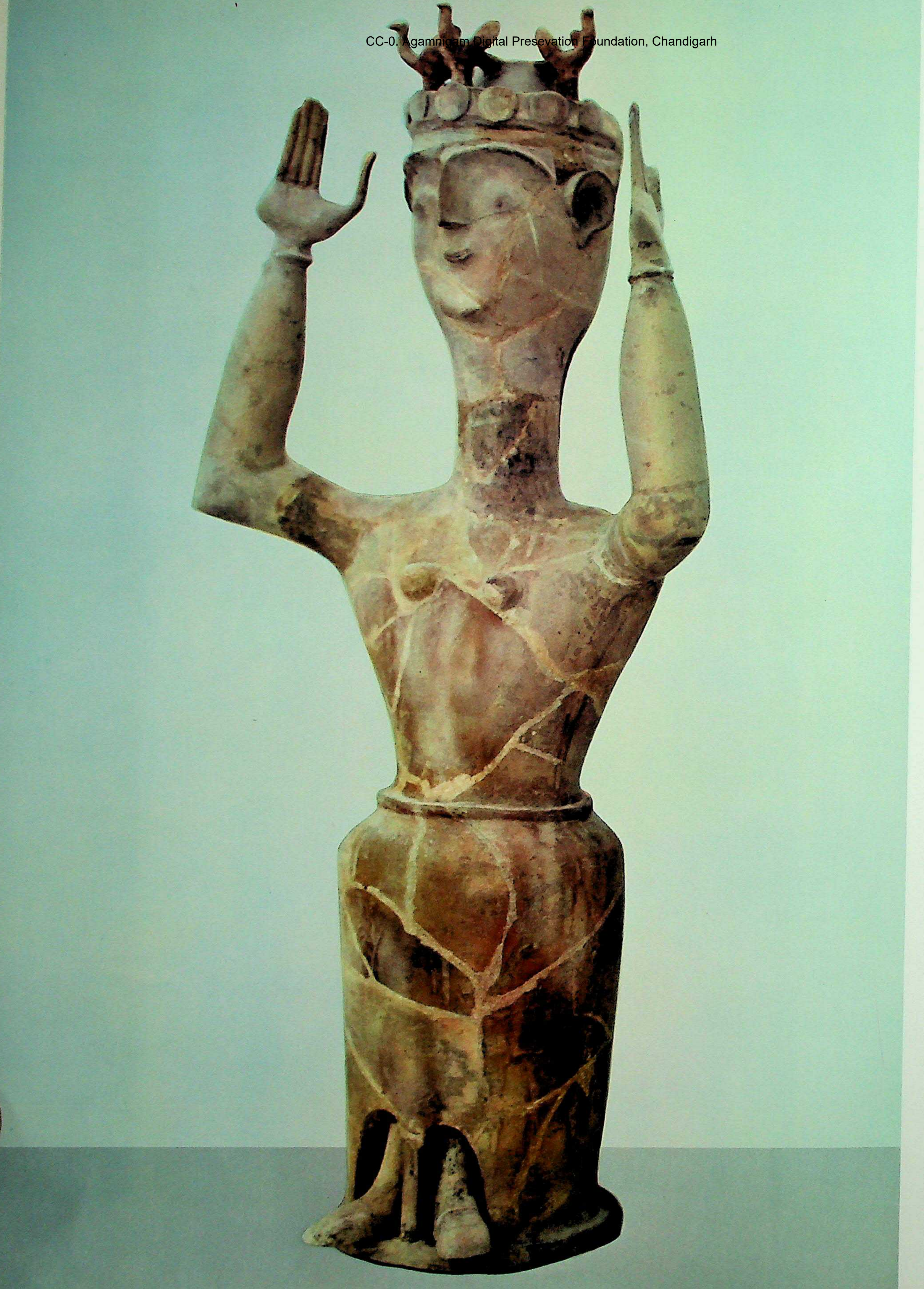


the Hagia Triada sarcophagus: the double axe; the conventionalized bull-horns, known as votive horns; the tree, whose sacred character we have already observed; the perching bird—the sign, perhaps, of the divine presence.

It may well be the deceased man, accompanied by his consort or a goddess, who is portrayed in a chariot on the two ends of the sarcophagus. The chariot, reproduced on p. 91, is drawn by griffins—winged lions with the heads of birds—which are decidedly oriental in character. The Anatolians, in common with the Semitic peoples, had astonishingly fertile imaginations when it came to creating hybrid monsters, many of which are directly connected with funeral symbolism.

There is no doubt that the Cretans of the Minoan age believed in an after-life. There is full proof of this in their burial places—not only in the spacious tholos tombs of the Messara plain, whose burial chambers are often more than thirty yards in circumference, but also in the simple graves of the humbler people, which were found in Mochlos, Phaistos and elsewhere.

In these graves were found many precious objects, placed there in piety by the living. For it was proper that a man departing for the next world should take with him his weapons, his personal ornaments, his seals, his implements, the sacred symbol of the double axe, bulls and idols. Occasionally, archaeologists have also discovered ashes and charred bones—very strong evidence that sacrifices were made at the grave-sites.

But the Minoans were in no sense preoccupied with death. Their great, irreplaceable sanctuary was the living world, where they could worship Nature, whose eternal and mysterious fertility was personified by the Mother Goddess. She was worshipped in high places and in the depths of caves. The ring from Isopata (p. 82) shows that her cult could dispense with man-made monumental temples.

Sacred caves were found in considerable numbers. Some yielded a wealth of votive offerings—and yet,

92 Terracotta figurine, Karphi (Lassithi plateau), post-Minoan

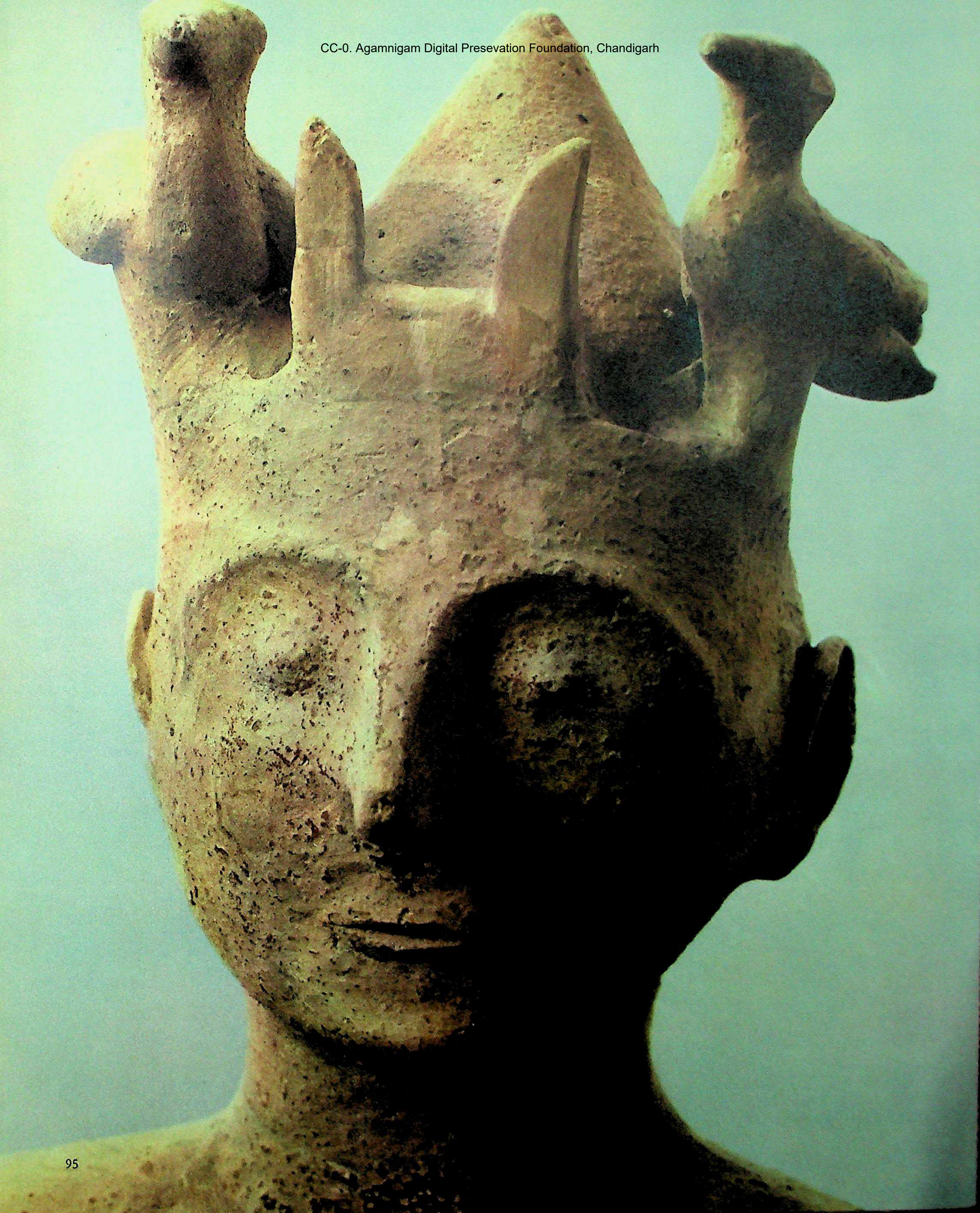
among these, there was not a single fragment of any kind of cult statue or image. The most tangible suggestion of the goddess's presence is provided by stalagmites decorated with drawings or roughly carved to give them something approximating to human shape. Some of the caves showed traces of religious ceremonies dating back to the beginning of the Late Stone Age. They were used throughout the Minoan period for worship and initiation ceremonies. In the historical period, the Greeks carried on the ancient rites without always understanding their meaning; we know what part was played by the Idaean and Dictaean caves and the summit of Iuktas in the legends relating the birth, childhood and death of Zeus.

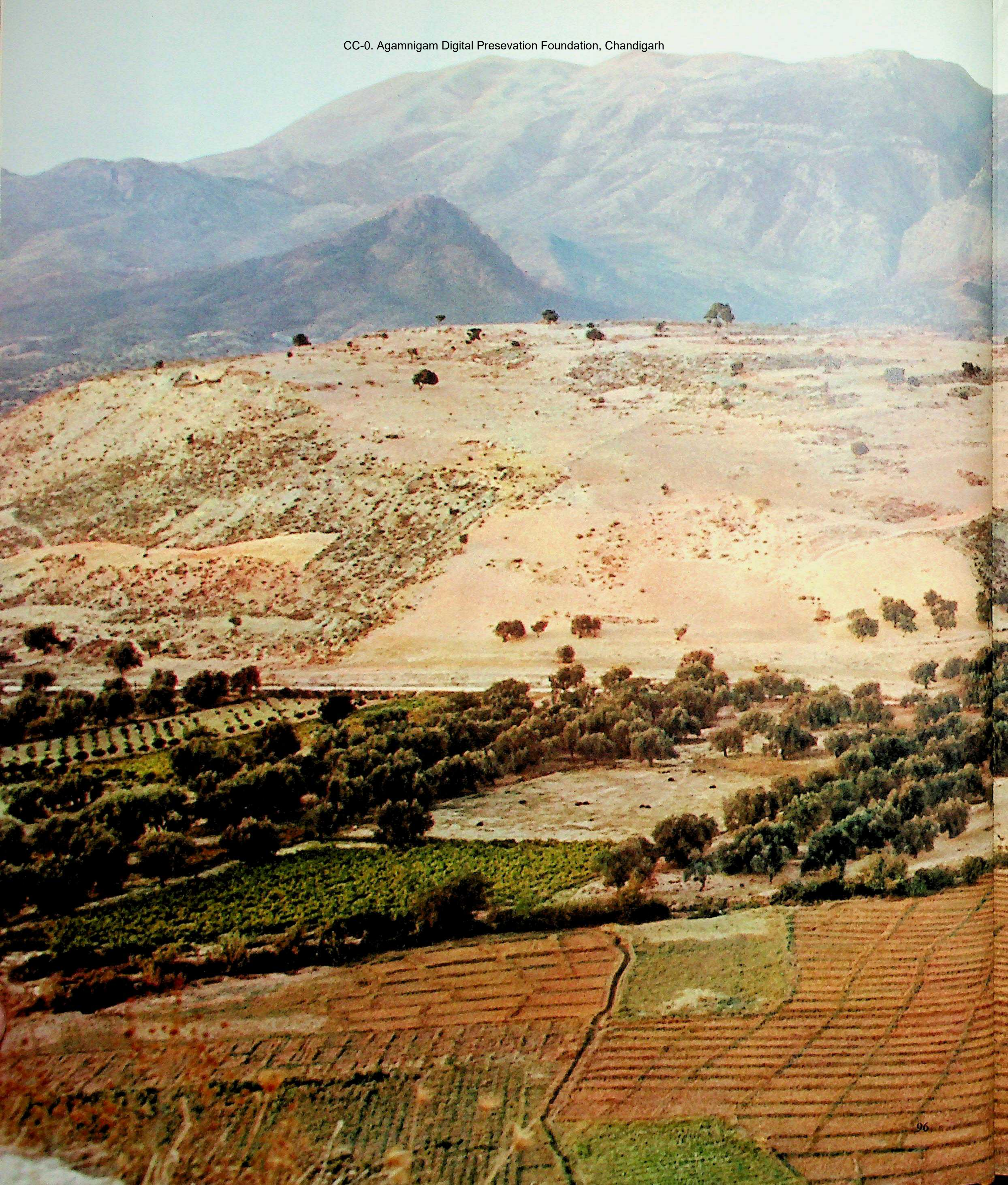
Often, though, the goddess was worshipped and sacrifices were made upon a natural hillside terrace more or less roughly prepared for the purpose. There must have been a great many of these open-air shrines and sacred caves. Here, we need only mention the hill-top sanctuary of Petsofa in eastern Crete and the one on Mount Iuktas above Knossos, the caves of Psychro in the Lassithi (ancient Dictaean) Mountains and those of Kamares on the flank of Mount Ida, made famous by the vases found there. And, as we know from two famous lines of the Odyssey (xix, 188–9), the sacred nature of the cave at Amnisos, the ancient harbour of Knossos, was to survive the Minoan civilization, since the Greeks came to it to worship Eileithyia, the Goddess of Birth.

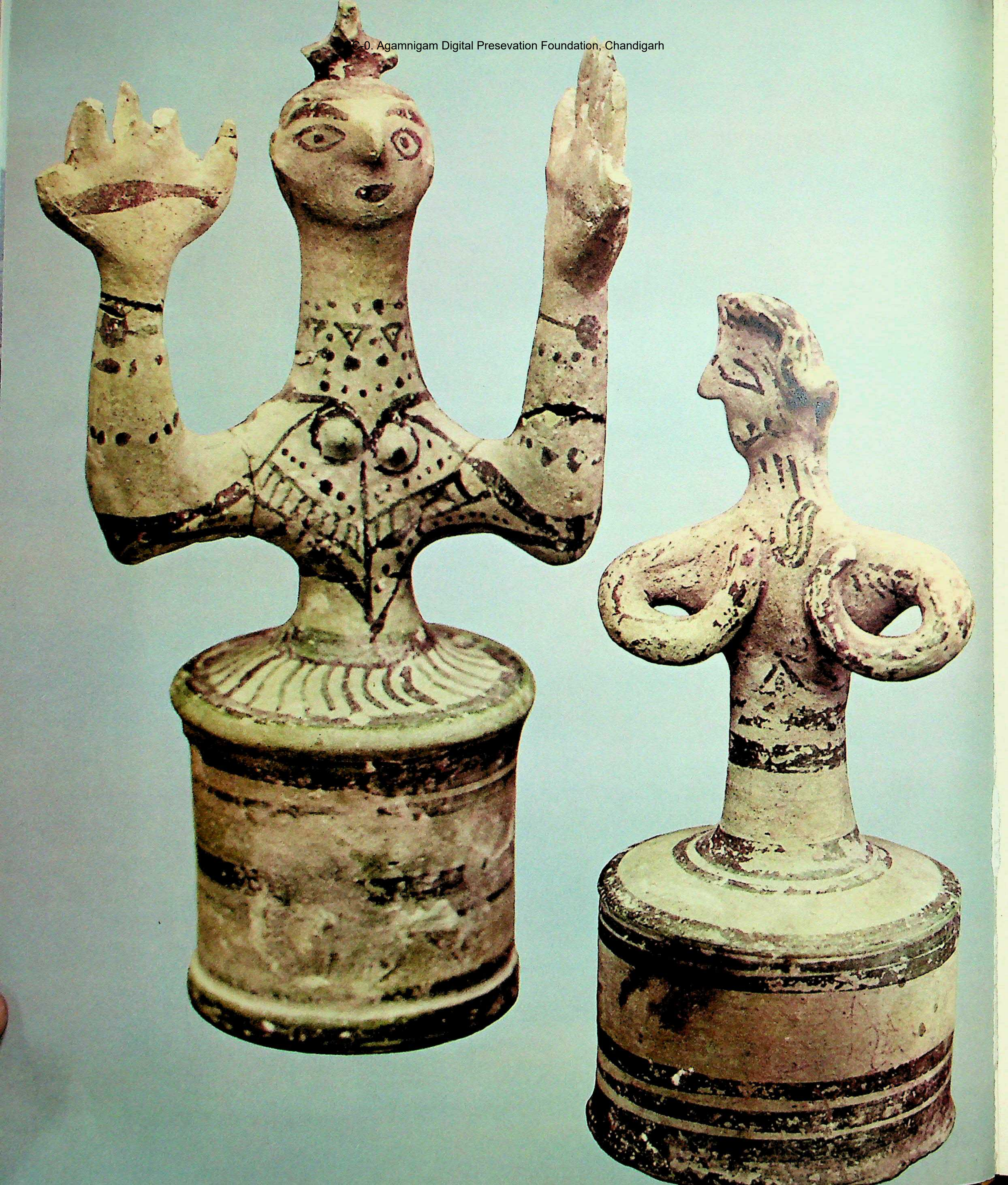
Crete, then, was strewn with holy places where the divinity appeared in response to the call of the rites, dances and music, and mingled with the people. In this respect, the Greeks inherited a legacy from the people who had gone before them. For they, too, venerated a large number of holy places where they sensed mysterious divine presences: such places as the grove of Athens, where Odysseus lingered for a final prayer before proceeding to the palace of Alcinous; the one at Colonus, 'A-quiver with the murmuring of the spring and the singing of birds' where, in Sophocles' tragedy, Oedipus dies; the site of Delphi; the Corycian cave on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, refuge of the Bacchantes; the Oracle caverns in Boeotia; the

Goddess, terracotta figurine, Gazi, vicinity of Knossos, LM III 95

Mount Ida, seen from the palace of Phaistos 96/97







Muse-haunted valleys at the foot of Mount Helicon; the olive-trees sacred to the goddess which are encountered at every turn in the Attic hills. We have here a whole world of spirituality from which the Greeks were to draw ample inspiration. Often, Christianity retained much of what paganism had bequeathed. The multitude of chapels close by mountain springs and the numerous places of pilgrimage bear witness that even today the Greeks consider certain spots propitious for contact with the Divine Power.

Many idols were discovered in these Minoan shrines, and in this book we reproduce a few of them. One can recognize the religious symbols—birds and votive horns, tokens of adoration and sacrifice, the hidden meaning of which we are unable clearly to comprehend.

Did the Minoans worship a single divinity, or several? It has been claimed that they possessed a bull-god, but its existence has nowhere been attested. Yet they do seem to have had male gods, and we cannot be sure that their goddess, appearing as she does in so many different manifestations, is always the same one. We see her entwined with snakes, as Mistress of the beasts, associated with birds, incarnate, perhaps, in the Sacred Tree. This could be a straightforward matter of metamorphosis—one single divine power in various personifications. But it is also possible that the differentiations were carried so far that they did in fact become separate divinities, or at least, divinities who were vouchsafed individual identities for certain rites at certain sanctuaries. This is a perfectly plausible hypothesis, and one which fits in with what we know of the Greek cults which were survivals of the pre-Hellenic era.

Whatever the truth may be, it was to this great goddess, in whichever of her many forms she might appear, that the Cretans attributed the gifts of the earth; they placed the first fruits as tributes in the recesses of those *kernoi* the most impressive of which was found in the palace of Mallia (p. 84). Here, they consecrated fruits and seeds as divine sources of life, in the hope that the miracle of germination would be annually renewed—and with it, the marvel of human awakening to temporal and to eternal life.

98 Statuettes from the 'Shrine of the Double Axe', palace of Knossos, LM III

THE FEELING FOR NATURE

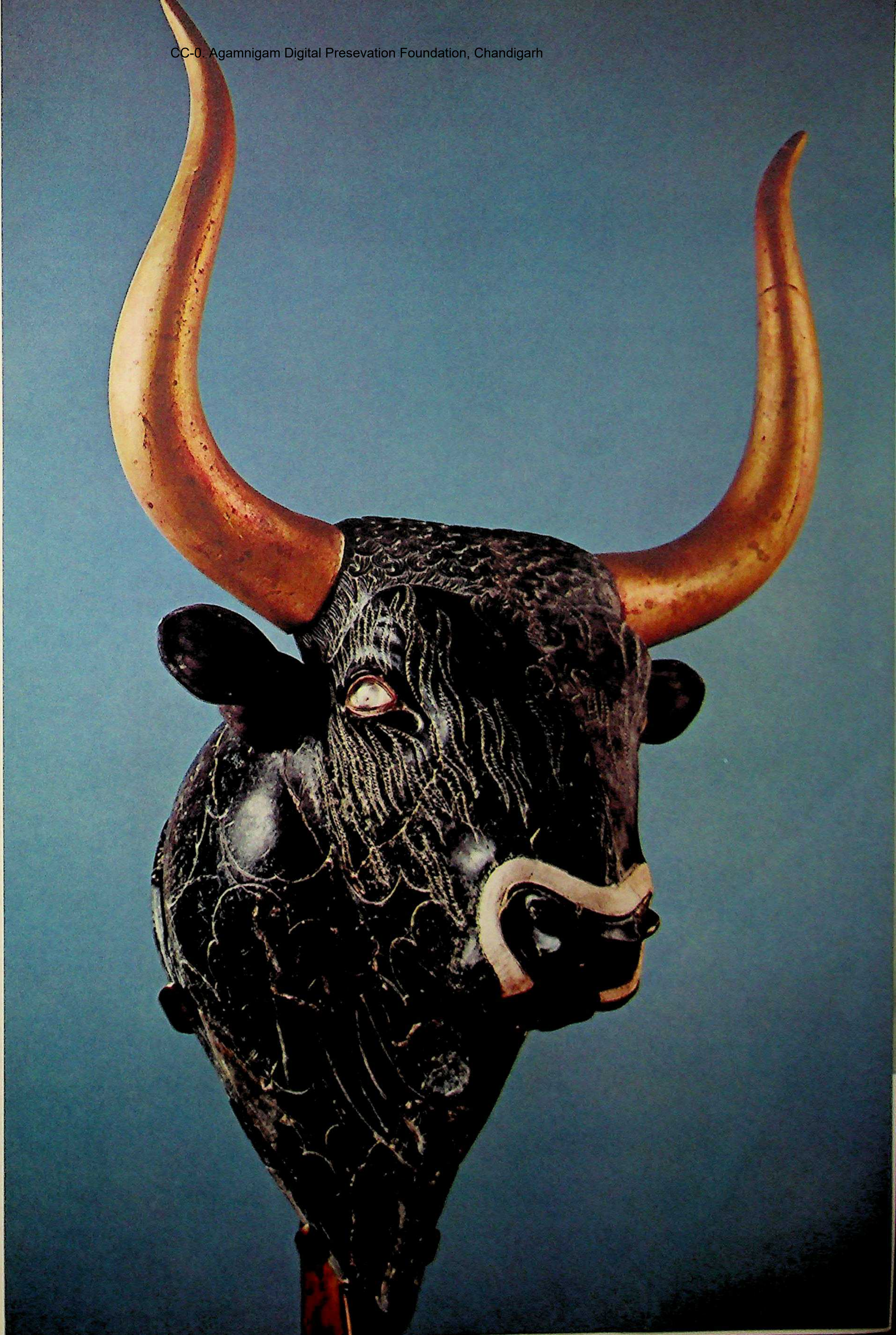
Through his religion, the Cretan was in constant communion with Nature, and this relationship had a profound effect upon his artistic sensibility. Even before the rise of the great palaces, Minoan sculptors had shown themselves to be keen observers. This is demonstrated by the two figures, dating from about 2000 B.C., which stand next to one another in our picture (p. 104). The small four-legged animal came from a tholos tomb near Porti in the Messara plain; the vessel shaped like a bird, from near-by Koumasa. They are primitive objects in terracotta, but the impression they make is immediate and unforgettable. They are so astonishingly life-like, yet we should be hard put to say for sure what animals they represent! Works of Minoan art often give rise to such perplexity.

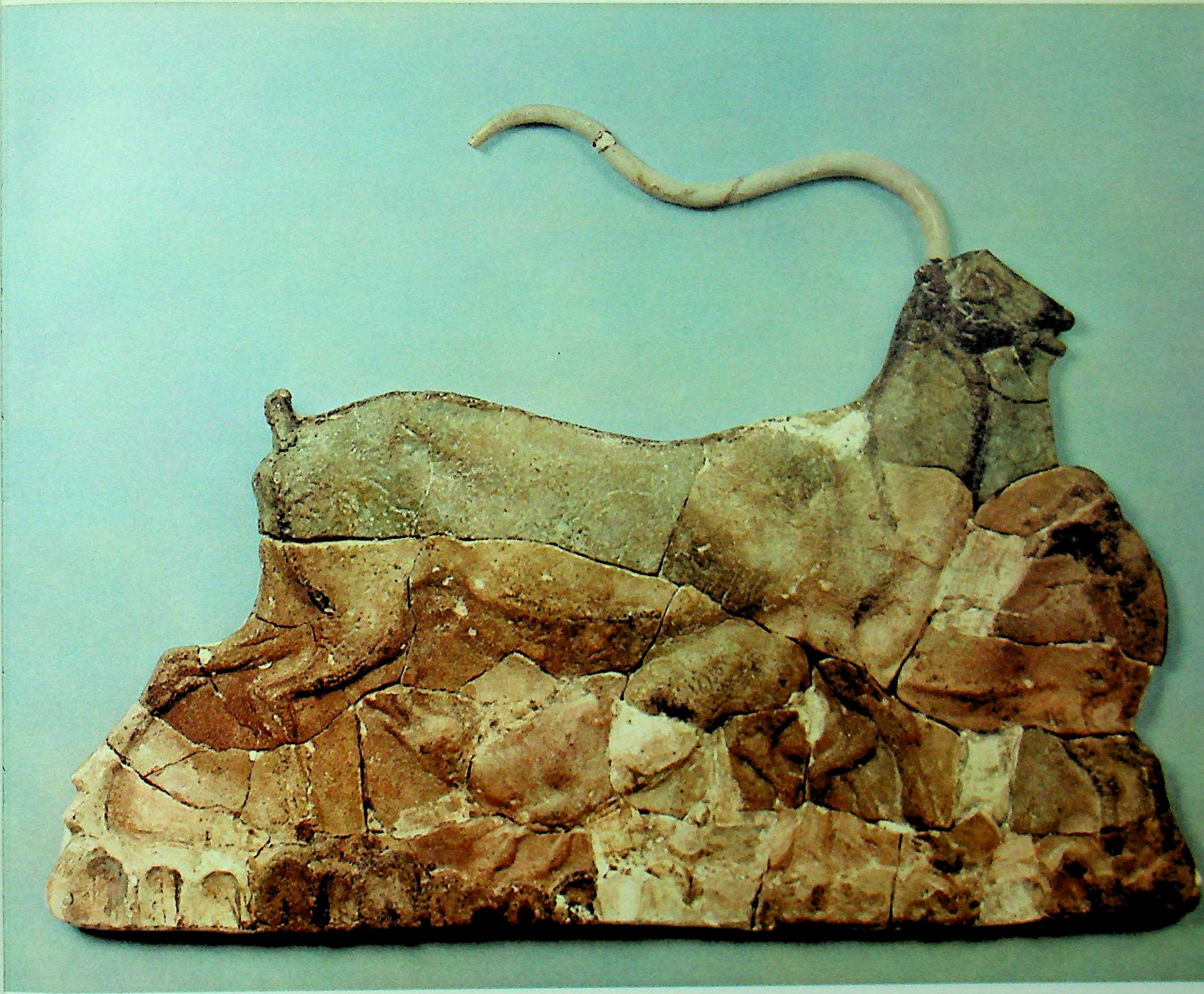
What is so natural is the way the bird opens its beak; the gesture of the animal turning its head to listen, no less so. Be it fox, jackal, dog, or some other creature altogether, the artist has caught all the grace of a fleeting moment; he has glimpsed—and preserved—the breathtaking miracle of life itself.

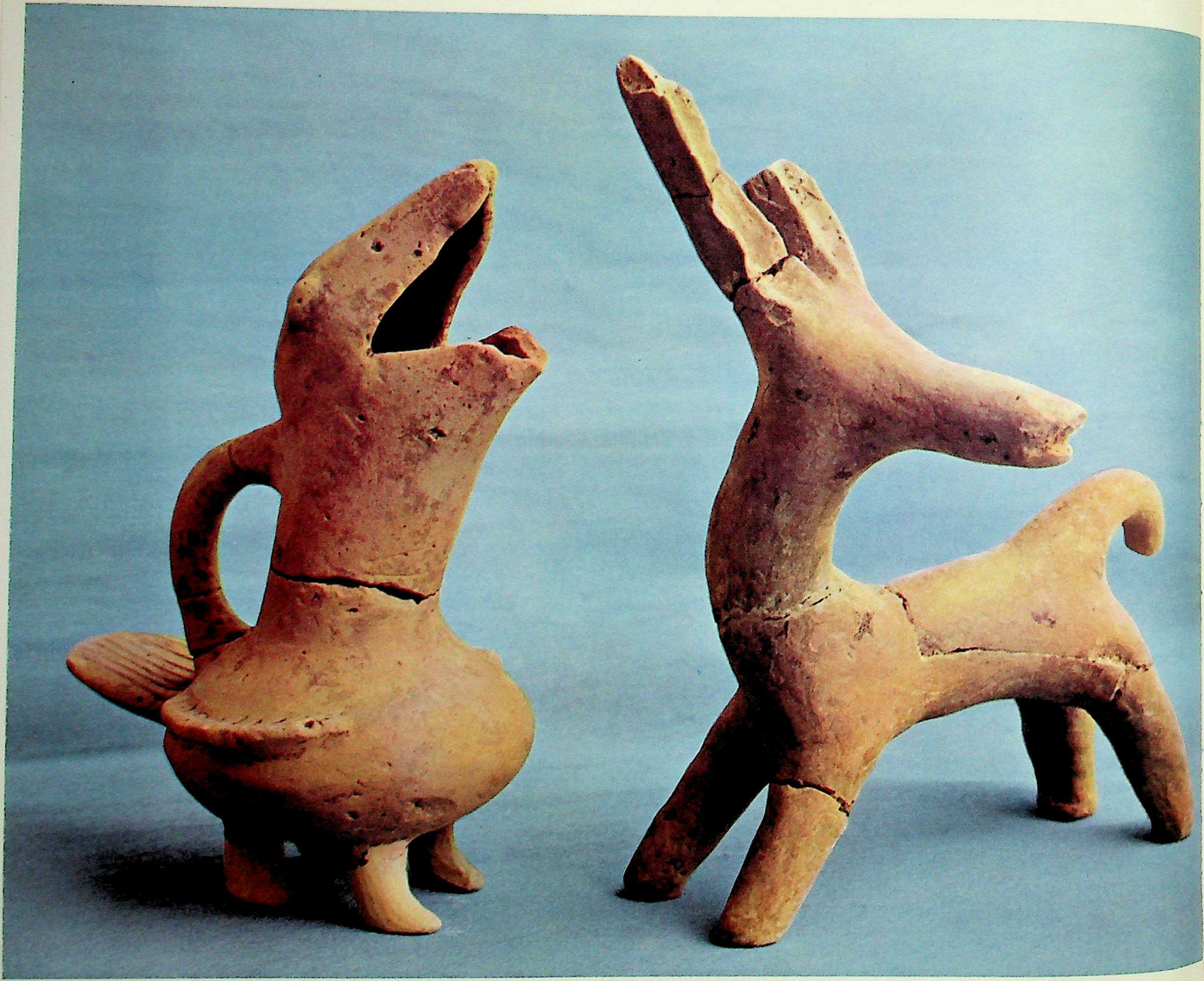
The Minoan artist was not a slavish imitator of Nature, even though he did derive from it certain forms and rhythms. By reducing everything to essentials, he has created new forms with a life of their own. His instinct was a sure guide. He has balanced the shapes and harmonized the lines, thereby producing works of art in the truest sense.

These same artistic qualities, uniquely refined, are recognizable in the figurines from a workshop at Piscokephalo in eastern Crete. Piscokephalo, a hill-sanctuary, yielded up terracottas whose originality baffled the archaeologists. They date from the end of the Middle Minoan period—that is, about 1700 B.C. The most

Rhyton in the shape of a bull's head, steatite, Knossos, LM I	101
Porphyry weight ornamented with an octopus, Knossos, LM I	102
Goat suckling its kids, faience plaque, Knossos, MM III	103







attractive of the figures, reproduced on p. 81, is a female one. The treatment is astonishingly free, yet the impression it gives is superbly naturalistic. Here again the artist has confined himself to essentials, simplifying the shapes and harmonizing the curves. The aesthetic qualities of the work are appealingly modern.

Some opinions attribute the terracottas of Piscokephalo to Asiatic artists or to foreign influences; certain experts have wondered whether they might not be Hellenistic, while others have even doubted their genuineness! But in spite of their extreme originality, these figurines betray the same artistic approach as we see in the great Cretan works of art: a keen awareness of Nature, freedom of interpretation, generous handling of gesture, form and volume, which are all reduced to their essential elements without losing any of their expressiveness—a wonderfully complete absence of superfluous detail.

The frescoes which decorated the stately halls and the sanctuaries bear this same stamp. Considerable numbers of such frescoes were found in the palace of Knossos and some of the neighbouring houses, in a villa in Amnisos near Hagia Triada, and elsewhere; but most of them were unfortunately in a very poor state of preservation.

Painting is the Cretan art *par excellence*, the art best suited to the agility of mind and spontaneous temperament of this artistic people. The Cretan fresco technique is similar to that of Italy, the colours being applied to the plaster while it is still wet, so that they penetrate deeply into it—a method which demands boldness of conception and skill in execution.

The fresco seems to have come into being somewhat suddenly at the end of the eighteenth century B.C.—that is, before the destruction of the first palaces—and to have developed its own particular style very rapidly. Perhaps there were outside influences: paintings found at Mari, in Syria, and those of Akhenaten's palace, at Tell el Amarna, show undeniable affinities with those of Knossos. There is, therefore, a natural temptation to relate them. But certainly as far as the second group is concerned, if there was any influence,

104 Terracotta vase and figurine, from graves in the Messara plain, MM I

it worked from Crete to Egypt. Howbeit, these questions of influences, which fascinate the archaeologist, are only of relative importance.

We can still form a fairly clear picture of the Minoan frescoes as they originally were—but the reconstructions are sometimes a stumbling-block. The palaces were violently destroyed twice over; the collapse of the walls broke the plaster into tiny fragments, fire caused discoloration, and time and the elements also played their part in the process of disintegration. And yet, by patient sorting and sifting, the archaeologists managed to piece together a few motifs. A great many gaps remained, but it was possible to fill these in more or less accurately, on the evidence of those parts which had been preserved. And so we have today a considerable number of these fragments—though they are at best a pale reflection of the frescoes' original beauty. The portions that were blackened by fire have lost all their lustre and brilliance, and their outlines are badly blurred. The reconstructed parts, on the other hand, are over-obtrusive, since attempts have been made to restore the original hues with fresh paint. Thus, the general effect is unbalanced and somewhat distracting. In other words, there are precious few frescoes that lend themselves to colour reproduction in a book of this type. Some have already been seen in the chapters on Minos and The Lordly Life. Here is another (p. 109) that is very typical of the Minoan manner of painting. It comes from the 'House of the Frescoes' in Knossos, dating from about 1600 B.C., and depicts flowers in a rocky landscape. Between iris and reeds (there are also flowering wild roses) sits a bird with neck outstretched. It has just finished drinking from the clear water that runs between the rocks, and is poised ready to fly away.

The essential parts of this painting were certainly derived from Nature, but a sparkling mind has interpreted them. The colours are the artist's own; the bird is blue (as is the monkey who appears in another part of the same fresco). Its movements are completely realistic and beautifully observed, but the species is no easier to identify than is the little animal from Porti (p. 104).

Similar frescoes were discovered in a hall in the royal villa of Hagia Triada; crocuses, lilies and ivy-covered rocks frame the figure of a woman executing a mystical dance before a chapel. Here, a bull paces on its leisured way; there a hare flees; whilst a cat, superbly portrayed, stalks a peacefully pecking pheasant. Only a few minute scraps of this fresco survive, but they are enough to give us a fair idea of the over-all design. And some of the fragments—notably a clump of crocuses and the stalking cat—attest that the artist possessed genius; for Nature is reproduced, not just copied. Equally at his ease as the artist who decorated the 'House of the Frescoes', he is not content simply to string together a series of conventional themes. Although his style might be termed naturalistic, it has its own individuality, which appears in his treatment of line and texture, and in his ornamental motifs and plant-like arabesques. Sometimes he is guided by his careful observation of Nature; sometimes he casts away from reality and rides buoyantly on the tide of his free inspiration. And so he brings into being a singing, laughing world of light and colour, a garden of delight on which the eyes can feast.

The happy atmosphere of these frescoes underlines a notable aspect of the Minoan civilization: its gaiety. The Minoan enjoyed life fully. He was not plagued by the malevolent ghosts which haunted the Semitic peoples, nor obsessed as were the Etruscans, by ever-present thoughts of death. And as an individual, he appears to have been granted a surprising degree of liberty by society. In this respect the Minoan civilization foreshadows the Ionian and the Athenian. Where this personal freedom exists, it usually shows itself in the arts, and the Minoan artist certainly displays a superb indifference to convention and tradition, as well as an inventive genius that is unbridled.

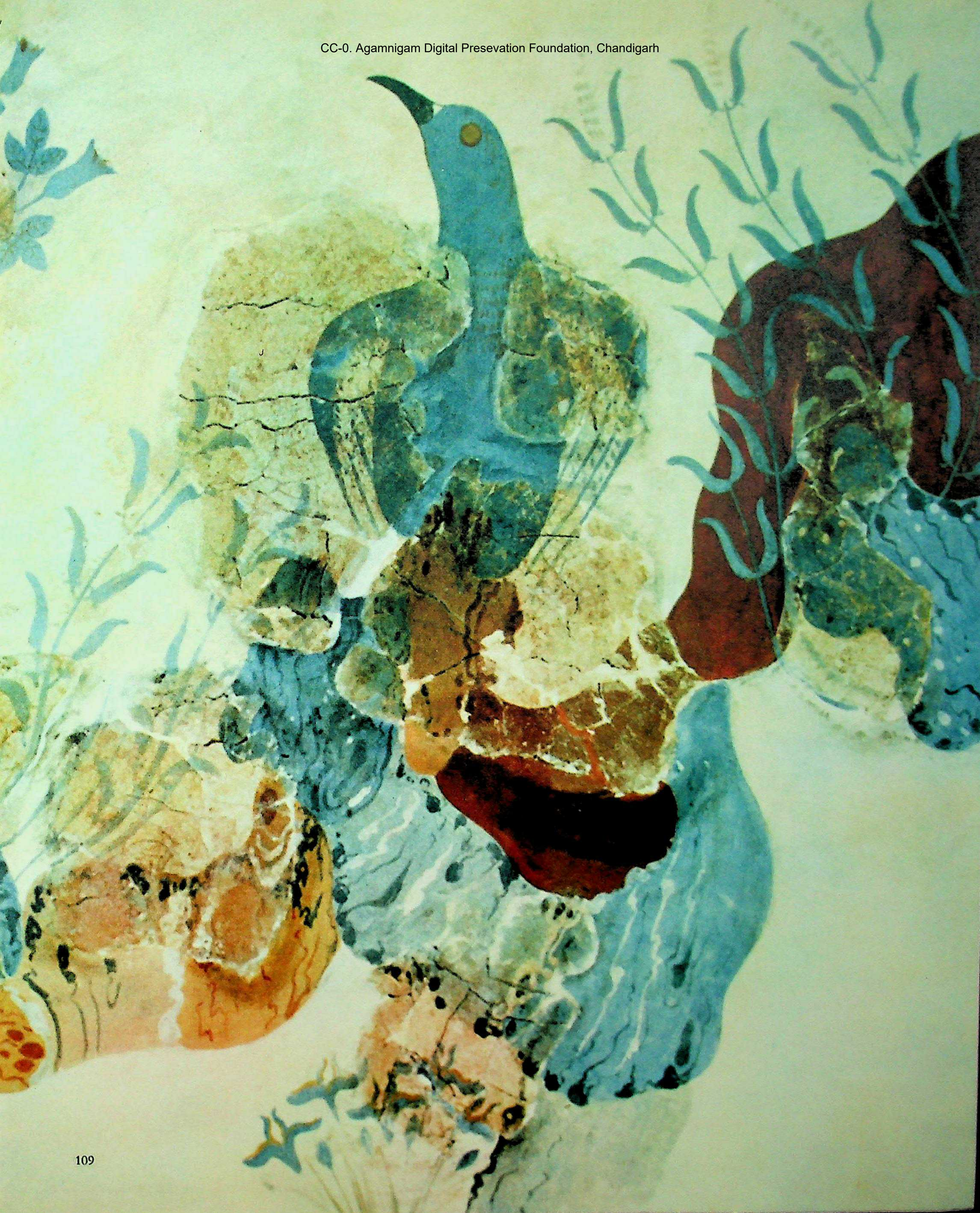
One final glance at some characteristic examples of Minoan art. Firstly a faience plaque (p. 103) found in that same shrine at Knossos where the 'Snake Goddess' figurines (p. 77 and 79) also lay hidden. On this plaque, a goat suckles one of her kids while the other, bleating its impatience, awaits its turn. These creatures have been observed with characteristic sharpness and clarity. The movement of the goat's head and the impatient bleating of the waiting kid are naturalistically conveyed, while the general treatment is nicely decorative. The anatomy is freely handled, and the horns are made the pretext for a pleasantly ornamental piece of improvization.

The bull played an important though as yet ill-defined role in Cretan festivals, both secular and religious, so that it naturally appears in their art. The impressive, strikingly realistic bull's head on p. 101 is, in fact, a rhyton made of black steatite set off with crystal, red stone for the eyes and gilded wood for the horns.

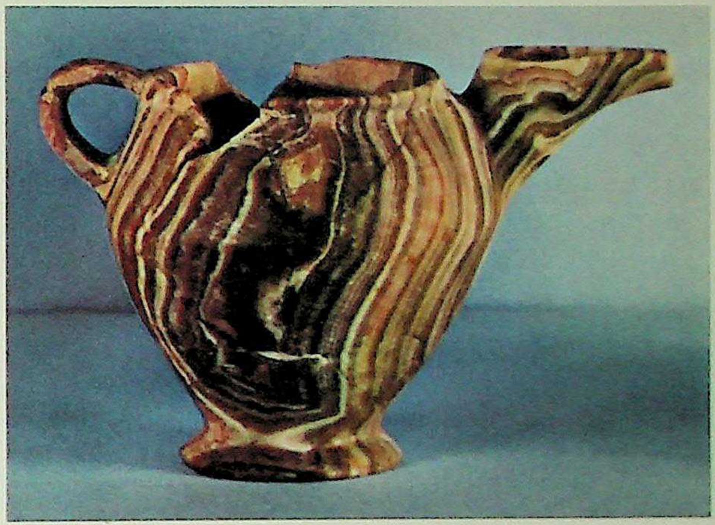
The Cretans were fascinated by the animal and plant life of the sea. A fresco, undoubtedly executed by a Minoan, which was found at Phylakopi on the island of Melos, depicts flying-fish sporting between algae and ocean waves. On another, dolphins leap and dive. The argonaut-snail and the octopus appear again and again—especially the latter; its tentacles and suckers, realistically conveyed, twine themselves in intricate coils around the curve of many a vase. A beautiful porphyry weight found in Knossos (p. 102) is likewise decorated with an octopus.

The human form is also well observed in Minoan art. There are many single figures—such as the superb female figurine from Piscokephalo—and some brilliantly handled impressions of people en masse, especially those found on some remarkable miniature frescoes in a crypt in Knossos, and those which decorate the famous steatite vase from Hagia Triada (p. 110). The impression of movement conveyed by the figures on the vase is breath-taking, and it is unfortunate that only the upper part of this important find has survived. On a slightly convex strip, shaped to the contour of the vase, and only eight centimetres wide, the artist has portrayed a band of reapers or, more probably, olive-pickers, striding past with their rakes in so lively, so natural a way that their cheerful singing is almost audible. Life—the real life that they obviously loved—pulses through the work of all these Cretan artists.

'The blue bird', wall-painting from the 'House of the Frescoes', Knossos, MM III	109
The so-called 'Harvesters' Vase', steatite, Hagia Triada, LM I	110



A RACE OF ARTISTS AND CRAFTSMEN



Stone vase, EM II

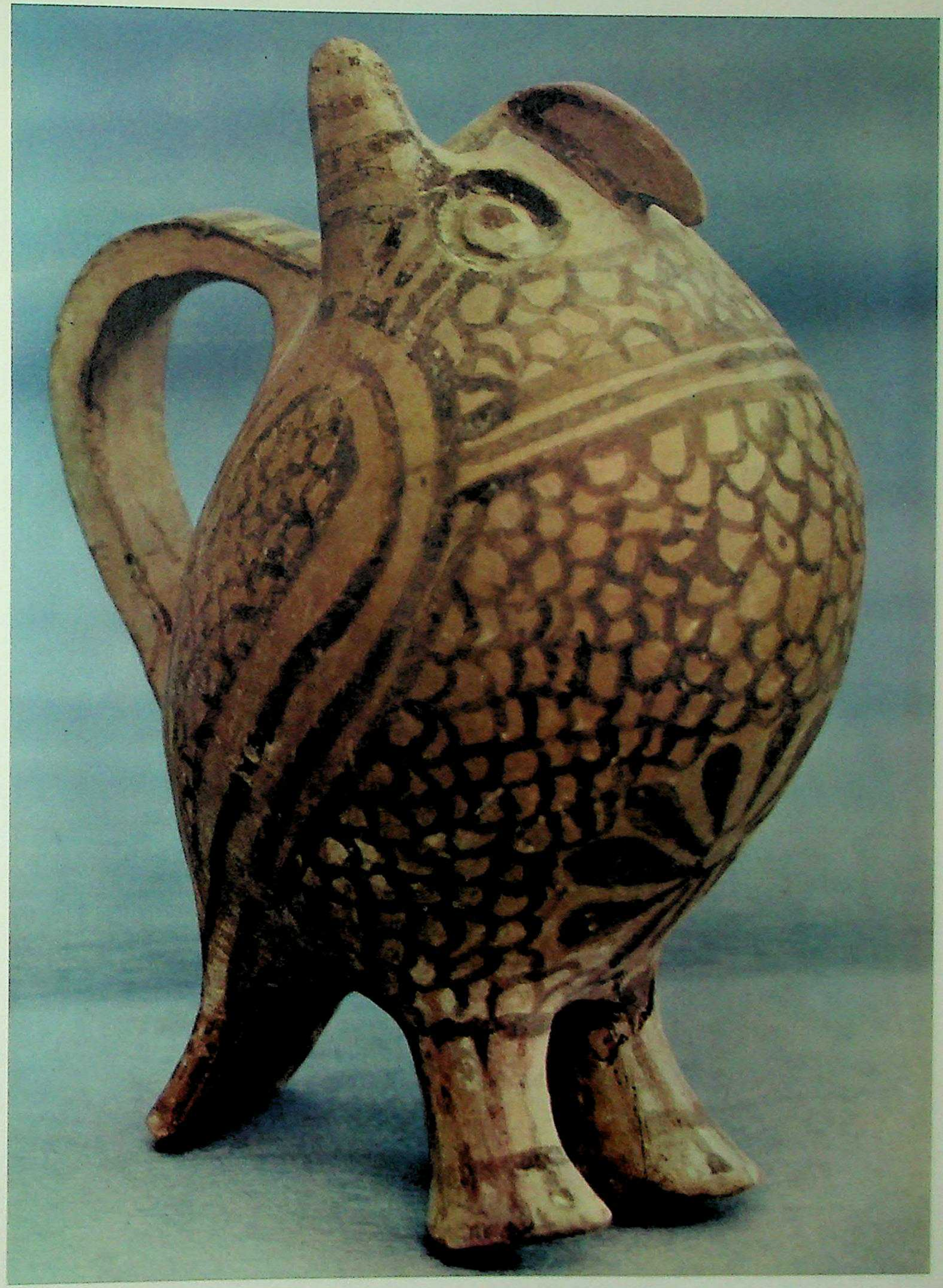
The arts and crafts reached a high level of workmanship in Crete. The palaces have given up a wealth of vases, ornaments, seals and ivory, bronze and terracotta figurines; the private houses, too,—proving that the taste for fine things was not confined to the courts of the kings and princes; it was shared by a broad section of the people. From a house in the little town of Gournia, and from Palaikastro in eastern Crete, came two of the most beautiful of all the vases, both ornamented with octopuses. Votive gifts, simple traditional 'ex voto' and public cult objects were, of course, also found in the sacred caves and hill-sanctuaries, and most of the bronze and terracotta statuettes came from such places. Excavation of the burial sites has likewise proved most fruitful, for the Cretans deposited objects of all kinds in the tombs, in the belief, no doubt, that they would be of some use to their dead.

POTTERY

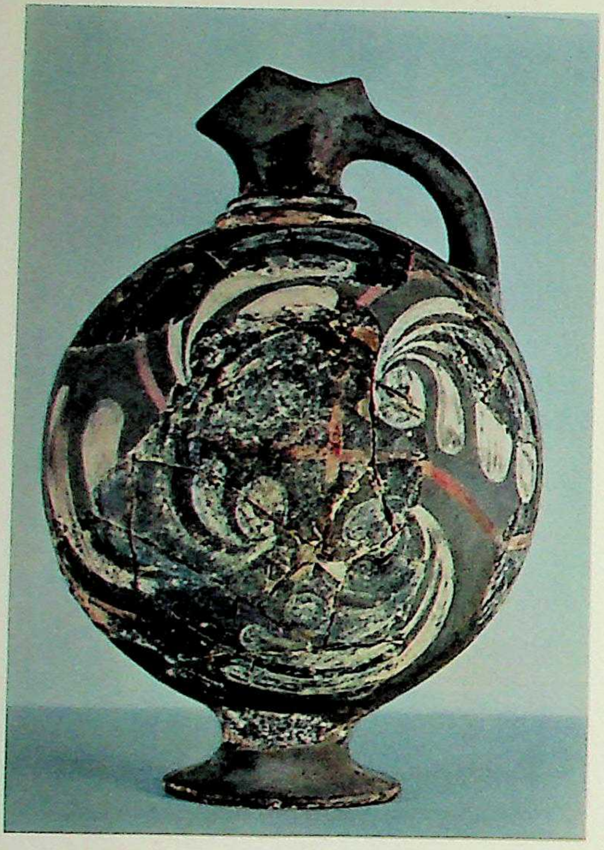
Ceramic work is undoubtedly the most fully represented of all the skilled handicrafts. Cretan pottery dating back as far as the Late Stone Age shows an enormous variety of forms, high-quality finish and fine colour blending. All these things indicate an expert firing technique. Still older vessels of stone or of alabaster (p. 111) were also found. These existed in especially great numbers and varied shapes on the small island of Mochlos (in the Gulf of Mirabello) and in the tholos tombs of the Messara plain.

From the second half of the third millennium B.C. on, ceramics profited indirectly from the development of the technique of smelting. Improved furnaces, fitted with bellows, were needed in order to reach temperatures high enough for metal-casting; and pottery-firing, benefiting from this technical advance, reached a high degree of perfection. Around 2000 B.C. a new type of vessel appeared. The first pieces were found in 1894, by an Italian archaeological mission, in the Kamares cave on the slopes of Mount Ida. Hence the name 'Kamares ware' which is applied to these vessels, even those discovered elsewhere.

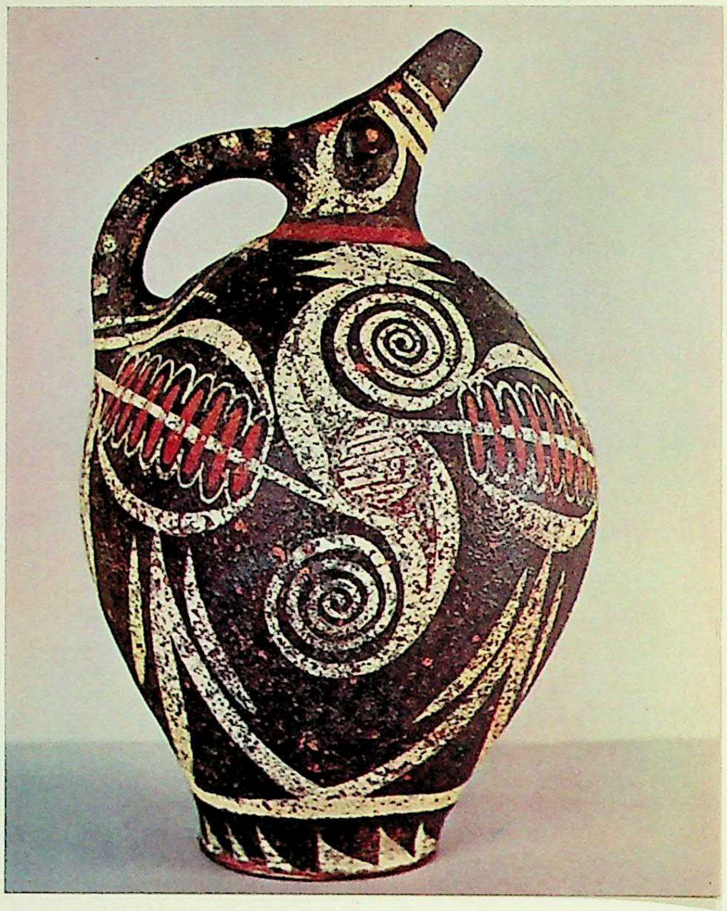
Over a period of three full centuries, Kamares ware improved and developed. It has been found all over central Crete, and is characterized by its egg-shell thinness (the potter was already using a primitive wheel) and by its colourful decoration—a muted harmony of blue, brown, carmine, orange, yellow and white. The painted patterns and the shapes of the vases are skilful and enormously varied. Many of the motifs are borrowed from plant life; some of them are drawn from life—like the palms which ornament a little jar from Knossos (p. 115), or the water-lily bloom which encircles a bowl from the same source. Occasionally, though, the flowers are so stylized that they turn into decorative abstract designs. The marguerite, so often encountered on vases, is frequently treated in this way—as, for example, on the 'egg-shell cup' (p. 114), so called because its walls are no thicker than one millimetre.



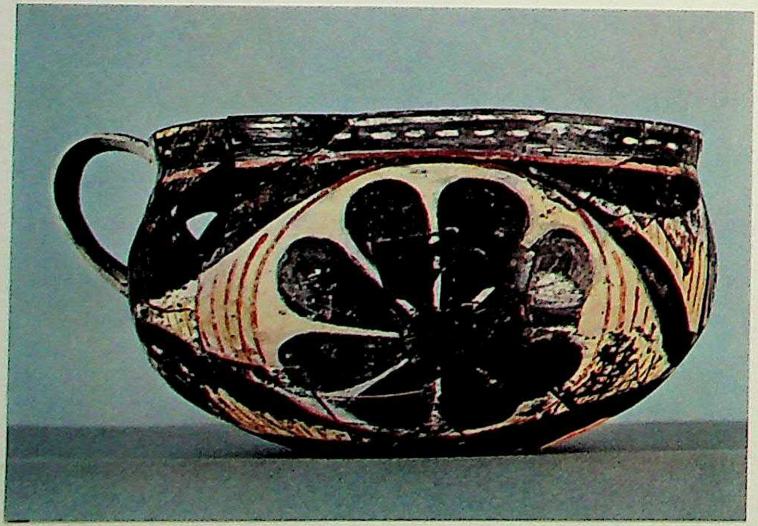
Bird-shaped vase



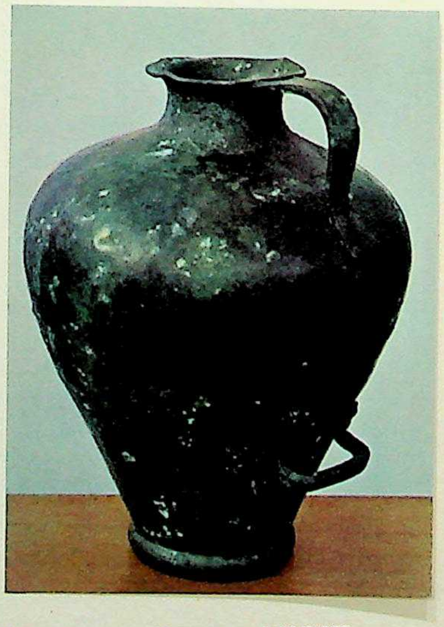
Terracotta jug, Kamares style, Knossos, MM I



Jug, Kamares style, Phaistos, MM II

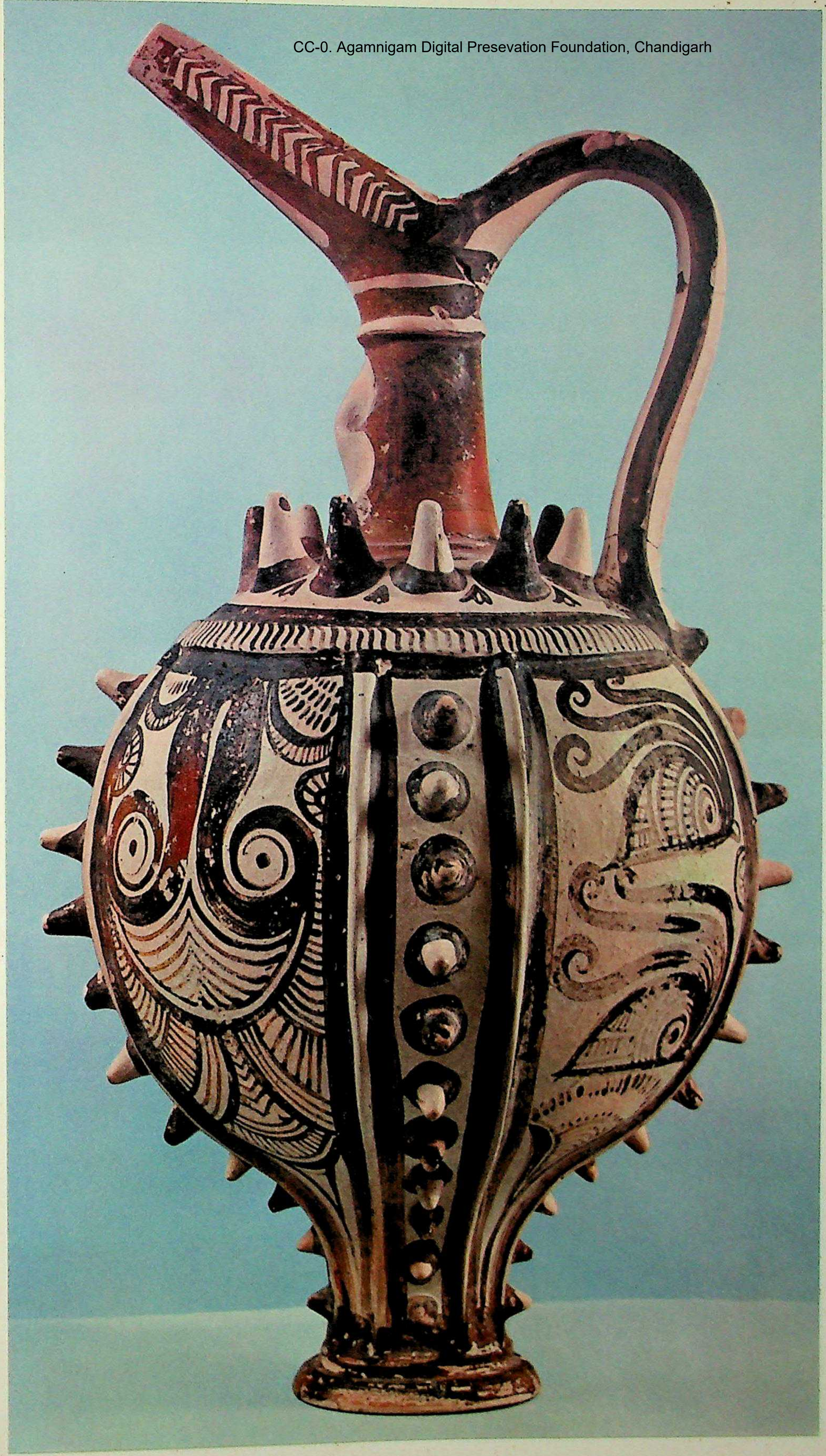


'Egg-shell cup', Kamares style, Knossos, MM II



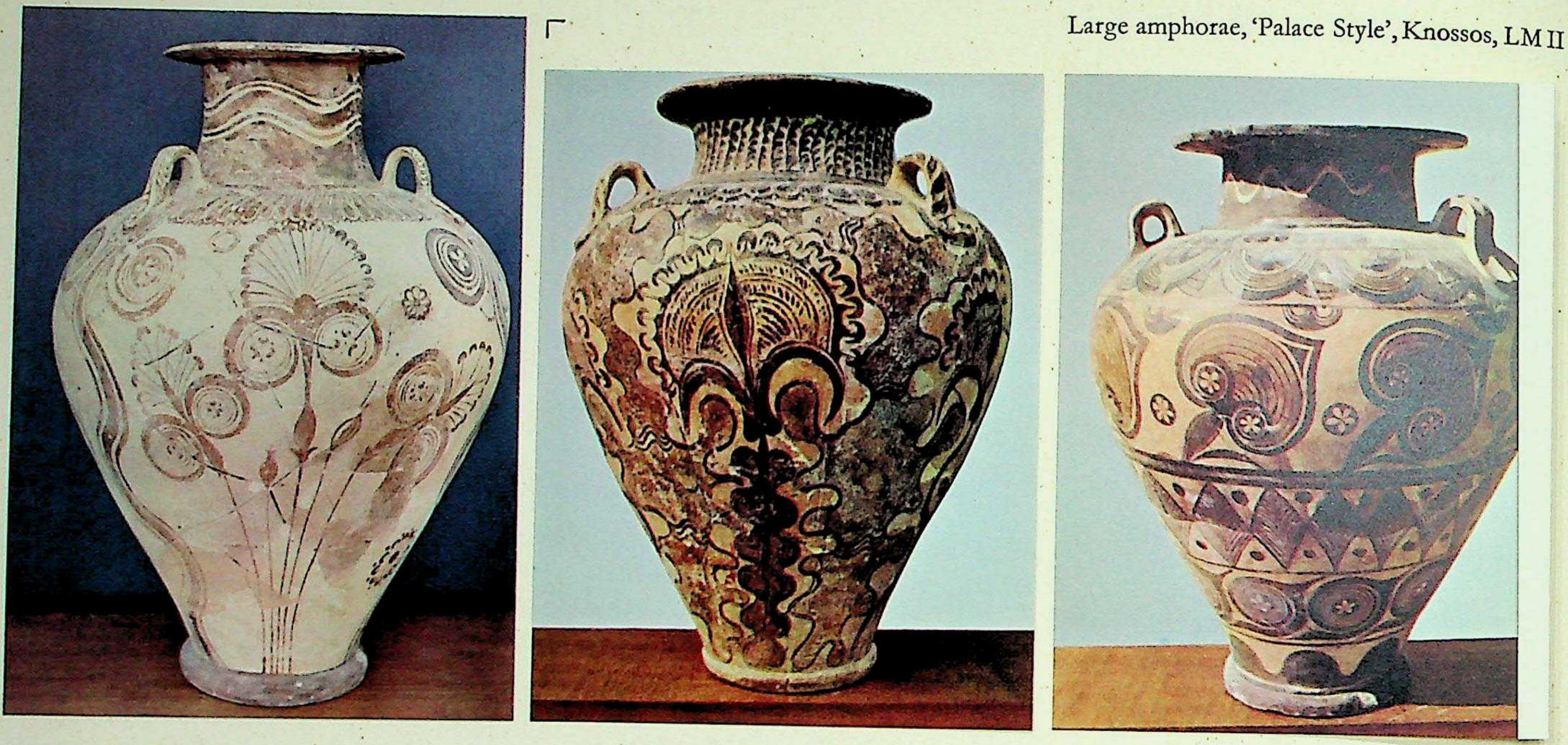
Bronze vase, Knossos, MM III

Pithos (storage jar) ornamented with palms, Kamares style, Knossos, MM III 115



Jug from Katsabas, LM III

Large amphorae, 'Palace Style', Knossos, LM II



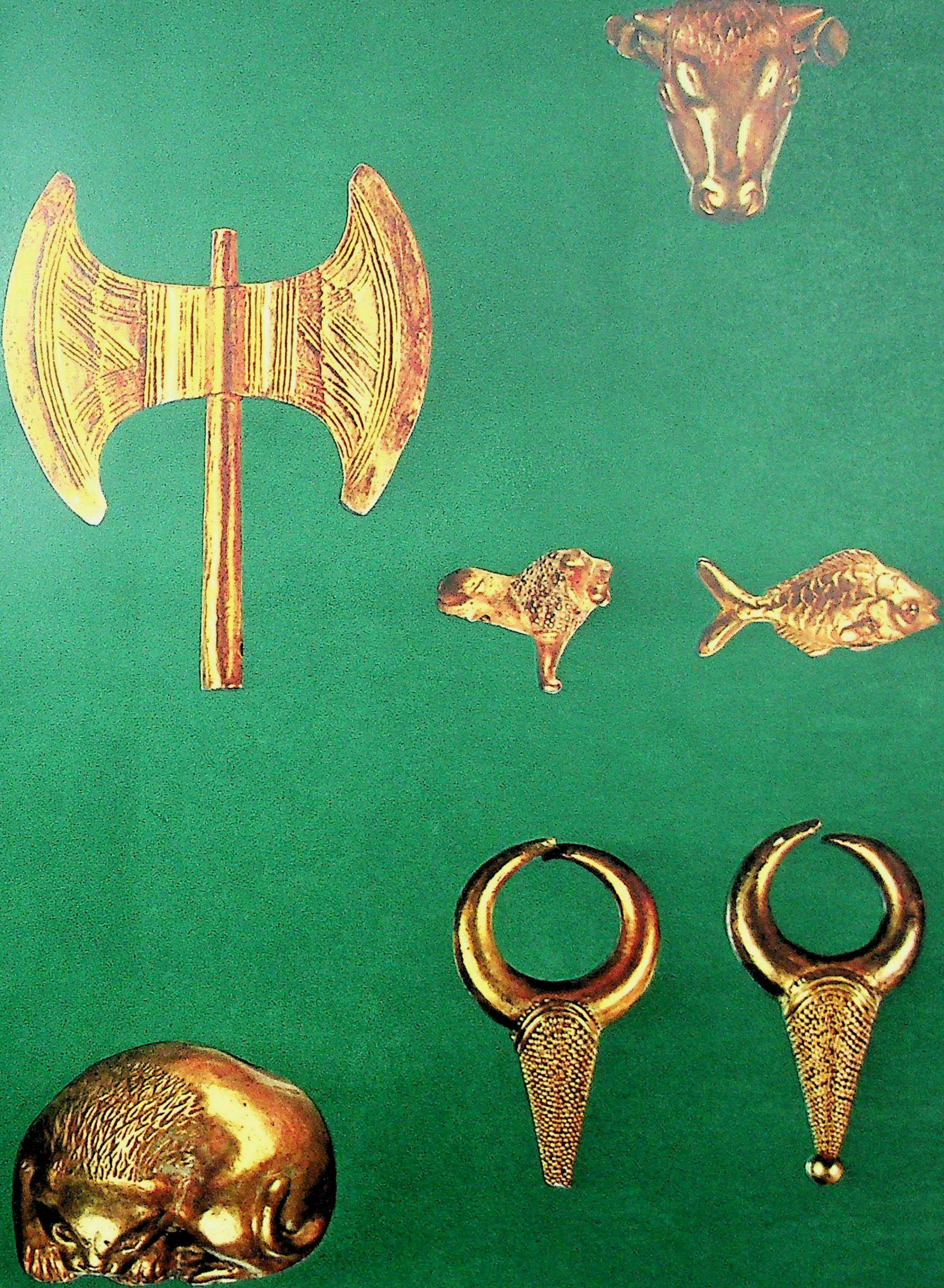
Still more of the designs are purely geometric; the spiral, often combined with other forms, undergoes endless permutations. A beautiful jug found in Phaistos (p. 114) displays the skill with which the best artists balanced and matched their designs. The whole surface of the vessel is animated; there are no 'dead' areas—and no overweighted ones. A gourd-shaped pitcher from Knossos shows equally expert handling of an intricate design: between the arms of a gracefully carved swastika, stylized flower-petals twist and turn as though they had become the glancing rays of some fantastic sun—a wonderful effect of movement.

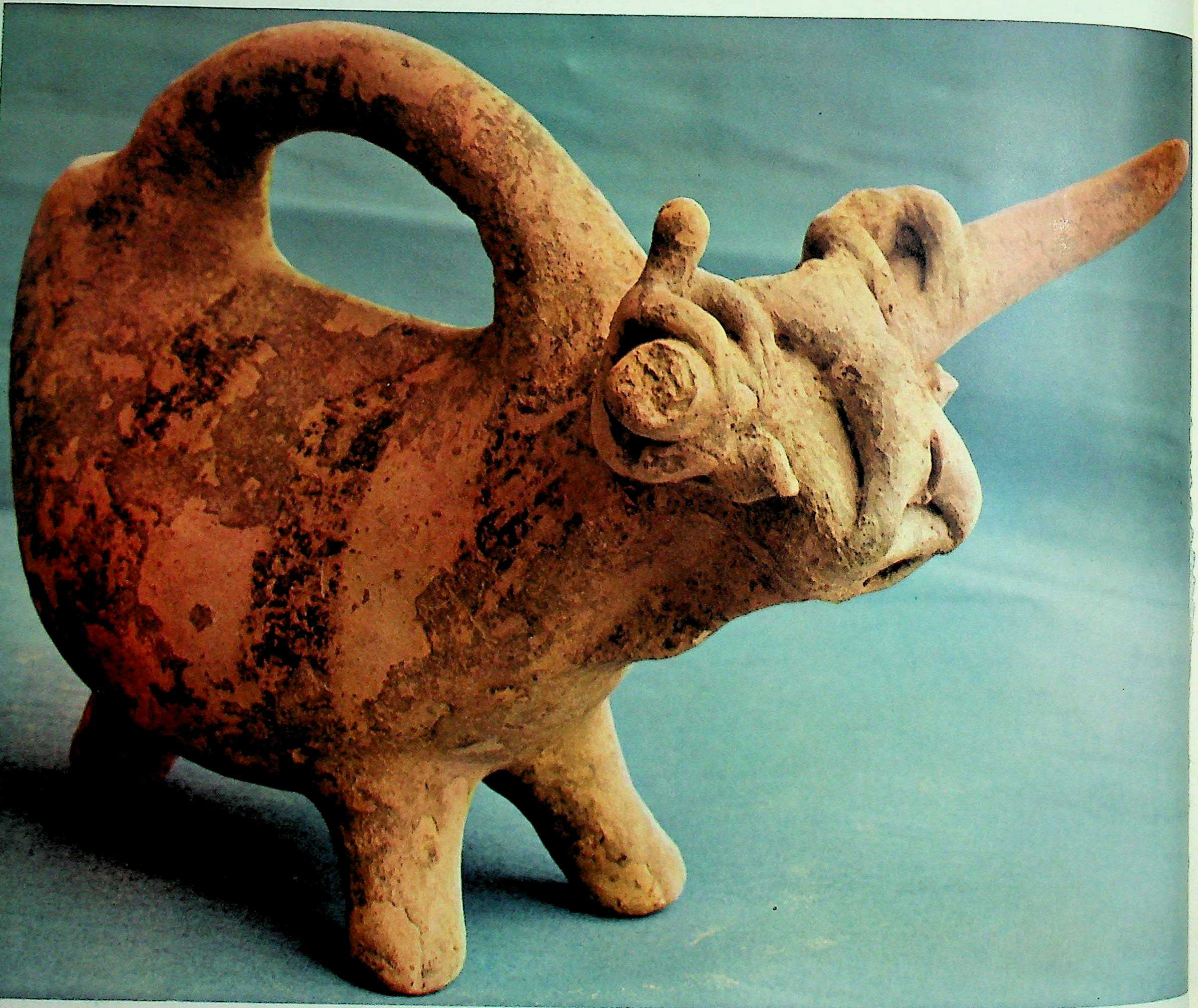
During the seventeenth century B.C., technical progress and the evolution of taste produced a new style. Whilst the fresco painters work in bright colours, the vase painters forsake them. Firing at very high

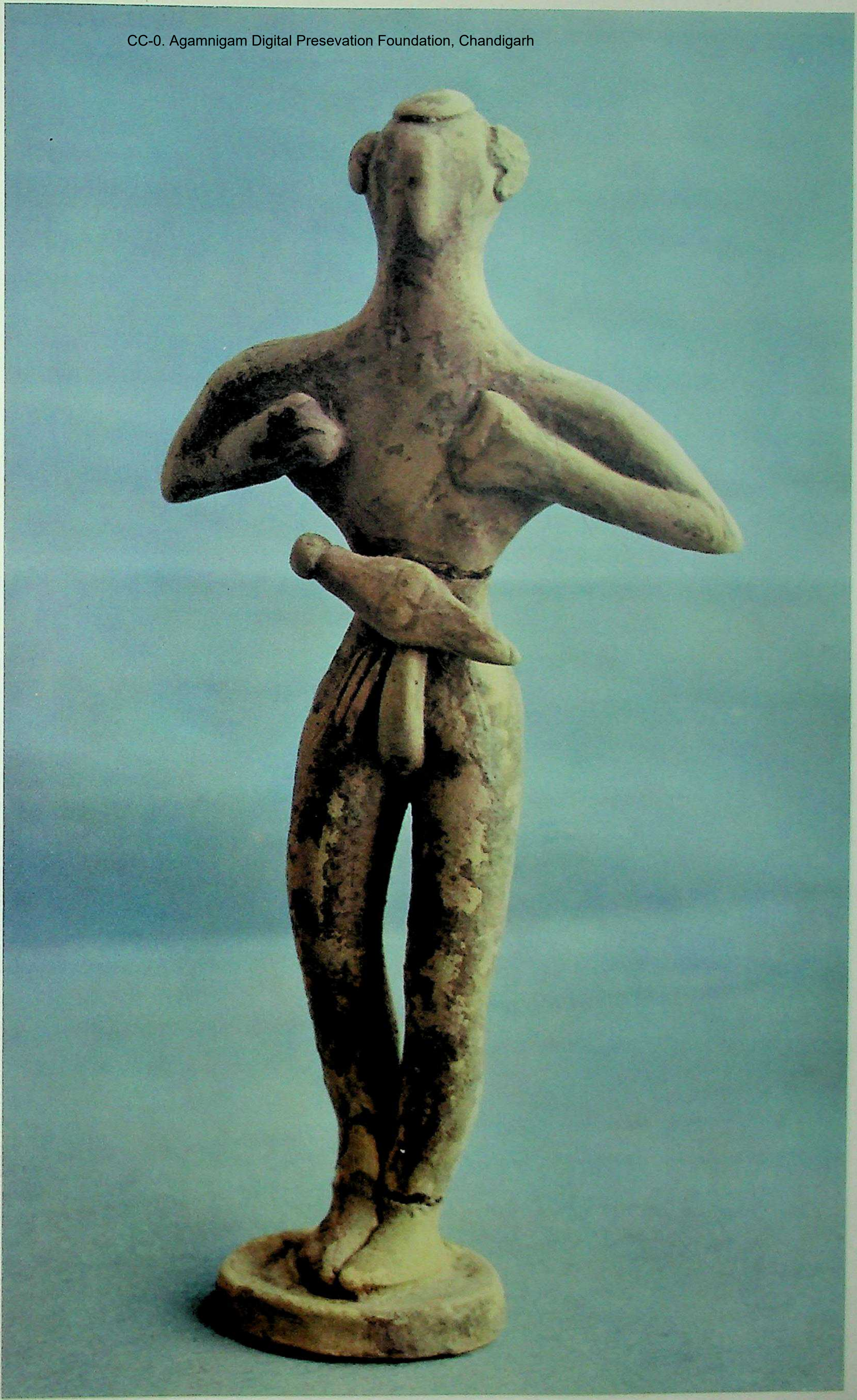
Terracotta figurine, Phaistos, LM 119

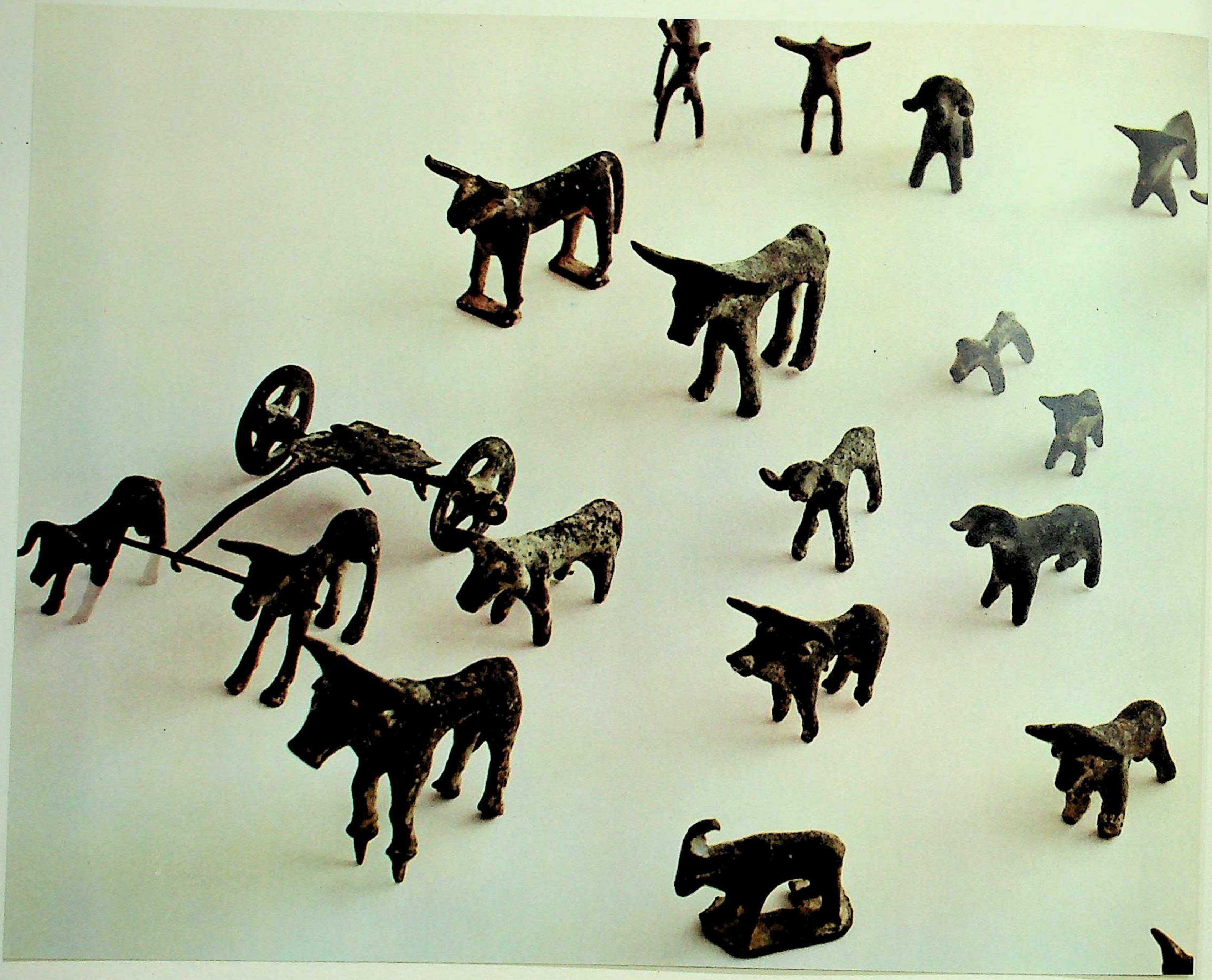
Gold ornaments from various sources, MM III to LM II 120/21

Seal impressions from various sources MM III to LM II 122/23









temperatures makes for greater hardness, but the colours become oxidized and turn brown or black. At first we find mostly light designs on a dark background, but later on we have the reverse—the patterns are black and the grounds earth-toned.

Cretan potters, like all the other Cretan artists and craftsmen, observed nature carefully and then detached themselves from it. Human figures and land animals are absent from the decorations, but flowers, water-plants and sea-creatures abound. At first, as in the frescoes, they are used in a naturalistic manner. Often, in ceramic work, a plant appears to grow up from the base of the vase it decorates, to climb and spread all around the contours. Lilies, carnations, papyrus stems or reeds are often used in this type of decoration. A splendid example of this is shown on p. 116: a magnificent jug from Phaistos, which is covered with a reed-like design.

Forms suggesting marine fauna and flora were highly popular. On the bulge of one of the most beautiful Cretan vases, an ewer found in Egypt (there was a far-flung trade in ceramics), now in the Museum at Marseilles, nautili or argonaut-snails swim among the algae. Some fine vases from Gournia and Palaikastro are clasped by the sucker-studded arms of octopi.

Later, this naturalistic decoration became more and more stylized, so that we find, for example, on an elegant pitcher from a grave in Katsabas (near Knossos) flowers and nautili which are, in fact, ornamental motifs from the traditional repertoire (p. 117). This trend away from the naturalistic is typical of the 'Palace Style'—the description applied to the very large decorated vases that were made in the workshop of the palace of Knossos during the first three quarters of the fifteenth century B.C. Most of them are very large three-handled amphorae: show-vases, decorated with designs which are very sure, but cold. On these vases, papyrus, carnations and octopi appear as near-abstract arabesques, completely divorced from any naturalistic effects (p. 118).

124 Three leapers on the horns of a bull, terracotta vase, Koumasa (Messara plain), MM I

125 Man armed with a dagger, terracotta figurine, hill-sanctuary of Petsofa, MM I

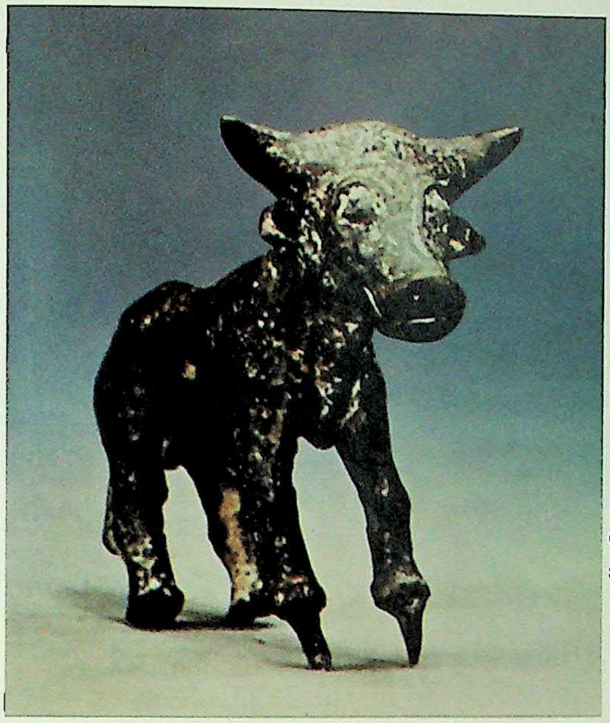
126 Small votive animals in bronze, from the cave at Psychro, LM I

GOLDSMITHS' WORK

The palaces of Minoan Crete were pillaged and destroyed shortly before 1400 B.C., with the result that excavations have produced no gold treasures to compare with those of Troy or Mycenae. All the same, a few gold ornaments from the great Minoan period were found in Knossos, Mallia, Hagia Triada, and in several tombs (pp. 120, 121). They exemplify the fine craftsmanship of the Minoan goldsmiths, and show that they were inspired by that same lively eye for nature which we see in the other art forms. The Knossos animals are tiny: the fish is slightly more than 1 cm. long; the duck, 2 cms. The bull's head and the young lion from Hagia Triada are similarly small. Perhaps the finest representation in gold of a freely interpreted theme from Nature is the ear-drop from Mallia, which takes the form of two bees grouped round a honey-cell. The bull's-head earrings from Knossos are a fine example of the Cretan genius for stylization. The two gold ring bezels depicting the Great Goddess have already been discussed (pp. 82, 83).

The reputation of the Minoan goldsmiths does not rest upon the finds in Crete alone. There is the evidence from Mycenae. Together with their rather rudimentary jewellery, their gold plate—more remarkable for its quantity than its quality—and the coarse, primitive masks that decorated their coffins, the Mycenaean kings liked to take into the next world the incomparably more precious treasures they had bought from Cretan traders or seized as booty during raids upon the island's coast—unless they had commissioned them from Cretan artists summoned to Mycenae.

Argos and Laconia have yielded some of the finest examples of Minoan goldsmith's work, in particular the silver and gold inlaid daggers with their hunting scenes, the rings from Mycenae and the famous Vaphio cups. These chased gold vessels, whose superb relief decorations depict the capture and taming of bulls, rank among the world's supreme examples of the goldsmith's art. As the illustrations in this book are con-



One of the small votive animals
shown on page 126

fined to the treasures of the Candia (Heraklion) Museum and the Cretan ruins, they cannot, unfortunately take in these magnificent cups.

SEAL-ENGRAVING

The Cretan is an individualist. To his belongings and his documents he likes to attach his own personal seal Excavation has brought to light an enormous number of clay impressions and of actual seals. In the earlier period these seals were made mainly of bone, ivory or steatite; in the Minoan heyday, precious stones were preferred—rock-crystal, onyx, jasper, carnelian, sardonyx and chalcedony. Hard stones, like basalt, serpentine and haematite were also favoured. The iconography of these seals is amazingly varied, and the fact that we have no Minoan writings makes them all the more valuable as a source of information. To give only one example—upon one such seal is based all our knowledge of the primitive hand-operated wheel used by Cretan potters during the period when the Kamares-style pottery was being created. Similarly, the artists who cut these seals tell us much about crafts, customs, clothes, living arrangements and religious rites.

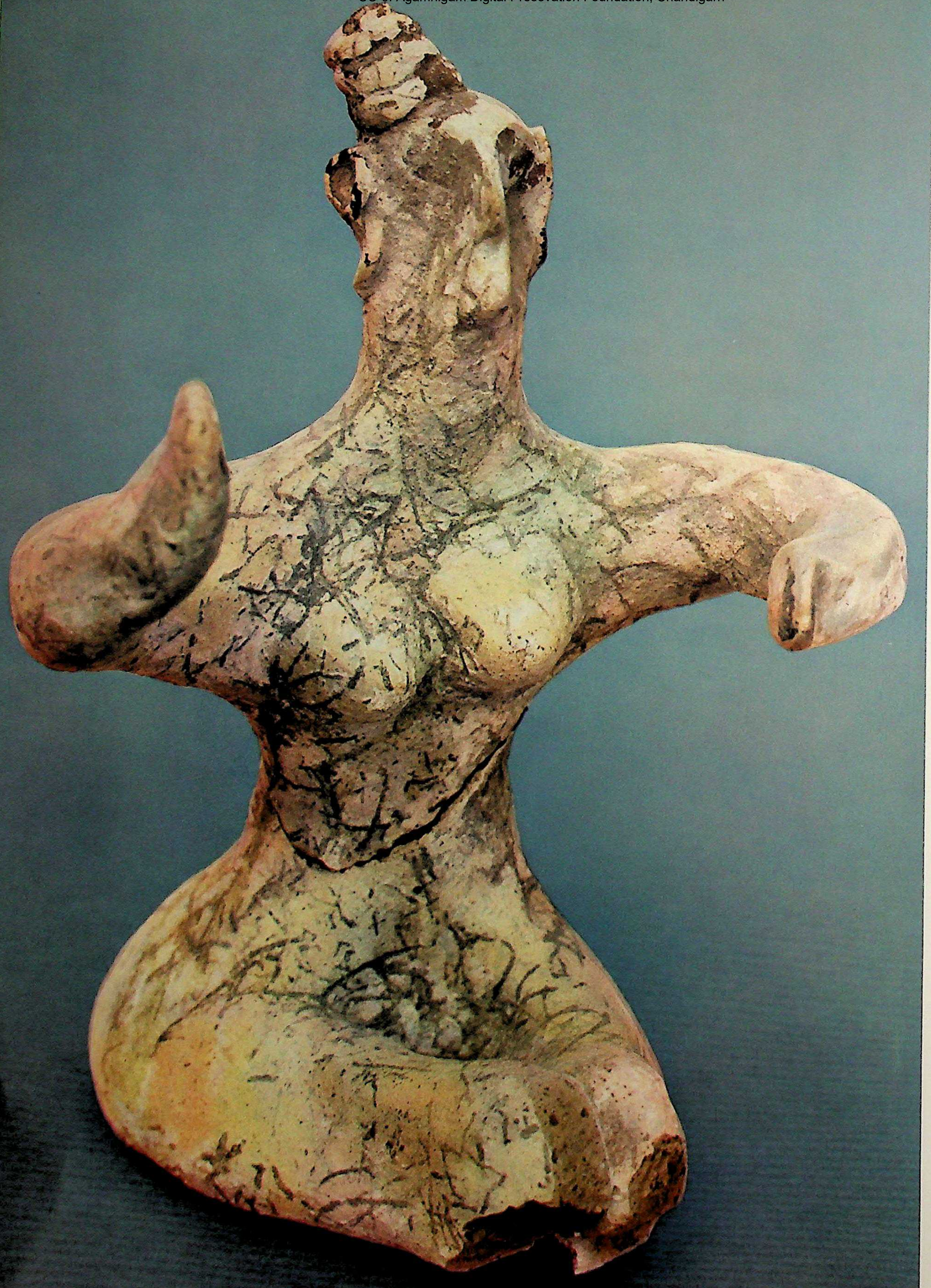
The seals are also a superb source of information about the development of forms and motifs. They confirm the existence of the clear trend towards naturalism as from the Middle Minoan period, which we have already seen in other works.

During the great 'Palace Period' the art of seal-engraving reached an exceptionally high standard. Whole processions of animals, half real, half fantastic, pass before us on the seals. The genius for realism of the Minoan engravers is staggering. There is, for example, immense forcefulness in the seal which depicts a wild goat covering his mate. The tenderness of the maternal instinct is faithfully captured in many scenes: a cow licks her calf; a goat suckles her kid. What could be more natural than this swan spreading out its wings amid the reeds, the calm repose of this couchant lion, or this ibex on its rock advancing with lowered head towards an angry dog which barks up at it with forepaws extended, tail erect and hair bristling!

Often the animals assume fabulous shapes: a lioness leaping at a bull is made to resemble a giant insect; the double silhouette of two stags back to back with heads inclined to the rear is wrought into an exquisite arabesque; above a recumbent bull hovers a great beetle, like a predatory monster.

The Cretan engraver peoples his seals with the sphinxes, chimerae, griffins and other fabulous beasts thought up in foreign lands, but he gives them the harmless air of mere symbols, not the grim appearance of terror-inspiring monsters. In fact, he probably enjoyed the pleasures of this world too much to trouble himself with vain nightmares. The world of the Minoan artists, as we see it today, is a peaceful world in which men

Vase in the shape of a woman, Mallia, EM III 131



ply their trade, acrobats turn somersaults over leaping bulls, dancing-girls swirl in their wide dresses, flowers blossom and animals disport themselves.

We cannot reproduce in this book more than a few of these wonderful seals (pp. 122, 123). But the visitor to Crete should go to the Candia Museum and examine at leisure the display of seals and impressions there. Gradually, the teeming, joyful life recorded on them will cast its spell over him. He will feel he has found the key to a world that is denied to those who can spare them no more than a cursory glance.

BRONZE SCULPTURE

Bronze statuettes have been found in the sacred caves and the hill-sanctuaries. The lordly habitations and palaces yielded fewer, for bronze was a precious metal, and certainly much coveted by the robbers from the mainland who plundered these places. The figurines are small; rarely as much as eight inches high. Most of them represent men, naked or wearing a loin-cloth, usually in an attitude of prayer or supplication; less frequently, women garbed as priestesses.

At least two of these Minoan bronzes must be classed—even by present-day standards—as masterpieces. One is a male figure found near Phaistos and now in the museum at Leyden. The other is a statuette of a praying woman which was purchased by the Berlin Museum at the turn of the century, but whose source is not known. The 'Man of Leyden', his back arched and his hands raised to his face, is often described as a flute player, but it is more likely that he is in an attitude of worship. The praying woman, wearing a voluminous priestess's garment, holds one arm before her breast, while the other covers her eyes. Her gesture is a most noble one. Another statuette, similar but less beautiful, is in the Heraklion Museum.

132 Female terracotta figure, Hagia Triada, LM I

Generally speaking, the Minoan sculptors cast their bronze boldly, leaving it unpolished and unornamented. This produced broad, well-defined shapes and surfaces, and lent a great fullness to their work. The small bronze animals which were found in great numbers, particularly in the sacred Psychro cave, are more popularly conceived, yet no less lively and attractive (p. 126).

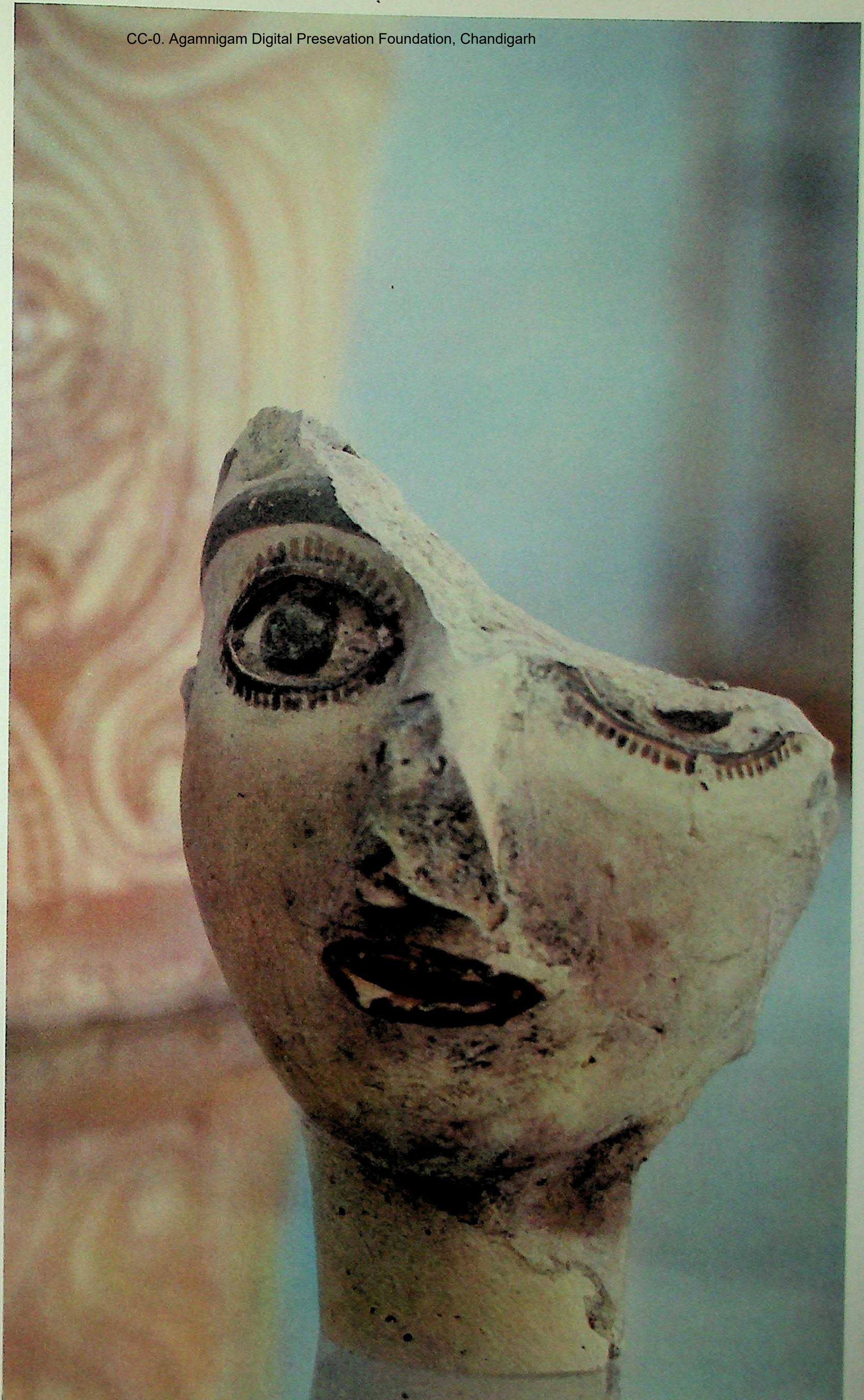
TERRACOTTA SCULPTURE

Minoan religion felt no need for statues in the image of its deities, and the kings do not appear to have commissioned carved portraits of themselves. Thus, as far as we know, the Minoan civilization produced no full-scale sculpture in the round or monumental relief-carving in stone. If there were any wooden statues, no trace of them remains, nor do they appear in any pictured scene; except, maybe, on one of the Hagia Triada sarcophagus panels, where the deceased, in the guise of a statue—or more probably a ghost—appears before the entrance to his tomb. But in any case, this dates from the late period. The bronze tresses, too, which Evans found at Knossos and took to be part of the decoration of a huge wooden statue, seem more likely to have adorned one of the large painted stucco reliefs, such as that of the bull in the portico of the north entrance (p. 60), or the 'Priest-King' (p. 54).

Small statuettes, as we already know, were found in great numbers and were made of many different materials, including, needless to say, terracotta.

Terracotta is a common material of great plasticity. Drawing inspiration from popular piety, local artists moulded countless figurines. Many of these were discovered in graves, as well as in the hill-sanctuaries of Petsofa, Palaikastro, Zakro, Chamaizi and Piscokephalo.

Terracotta head, from the cave at Psychro, LM III 135



As early as the Late Stone Age, vases were modelled in the form of a woman with protruding breasts (p. 131). These figures must have played a prominent role in the rites designed for obtaining fertility among the cattle and abundant harvests. Is it, then, too much to assume that the bare breasts of the Great Goddess are a symbol of life?

One of the most beautiful figurines from the beginning of the Middle Minoan period (about 2000 B.C.) comes from the hill-sanctuary of Petsofa at the extreme eastern end of the island (p. 125). It represents a man wearing only a loin-cloth, with a very large dagger stuck in his belt. The position of the hands raised to breast level is typical; it recurs over and over again in the male figures found at Petsofa and elsewhere. It is safe to assume that this has some ritual significance.

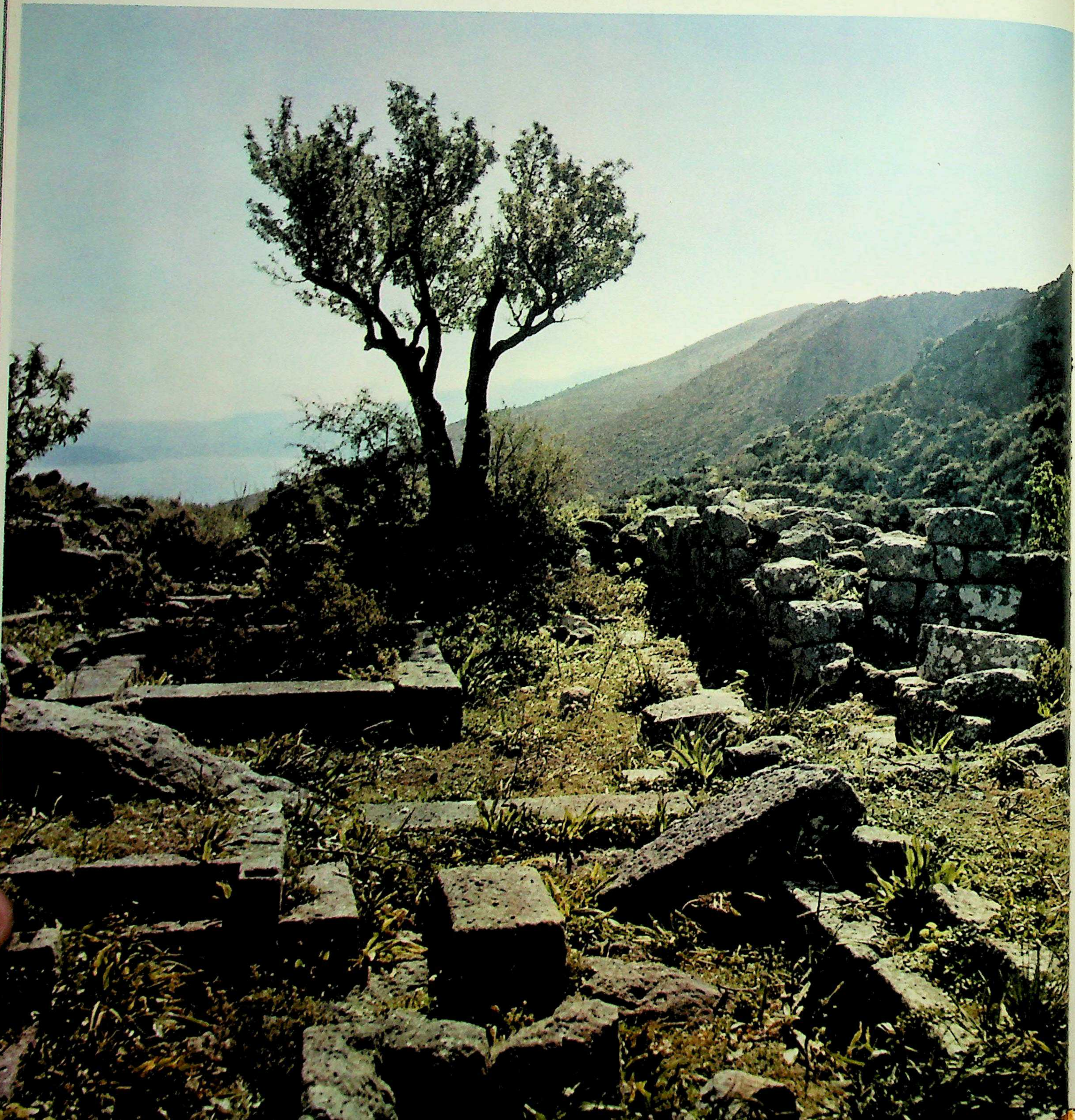
The female statuettes of this period anticipate by several centuries the 'Snake Goddess' of Knossos; they have the same full-length skirt, the same fully bared and well-developed breasts. In addition, the Petsofa figures wear a very curious large curved coif. They are similar in many ways to the statues from Piscokephalo, dating from the end of the Middle Minoan (c. 1700 B.C.). In the male figures, the characteristic arm position recurs. The arms of the female figure shown on p. 119 are crossed upon her breast, a gesture which also seems to have a ritual significance—probably symbolic of fertility and abundance. Practically the same attitude occurs in the figure of a woman found at Phaistos (p. 119).

The tholos tombs of the Messara plain yielded up some very unusual terracotta figurines, including the lively animal figures from Porti and Koumasa (p. 104) which were discussed earlier. From Koumasa also came an unusual vase in the shape of a bull (p. 124). This dates from the same period as the Petsofa statuettes, and is noteworthy less for its artistic merit than for its documentary value, since it shows how old the Cretan bull-games are: three acrobats can be discerned gripping the animal's horns and muzzle.

The seated female figure (p. 132) is appreciably later in date. It comes from a grave in Hagia Triada which

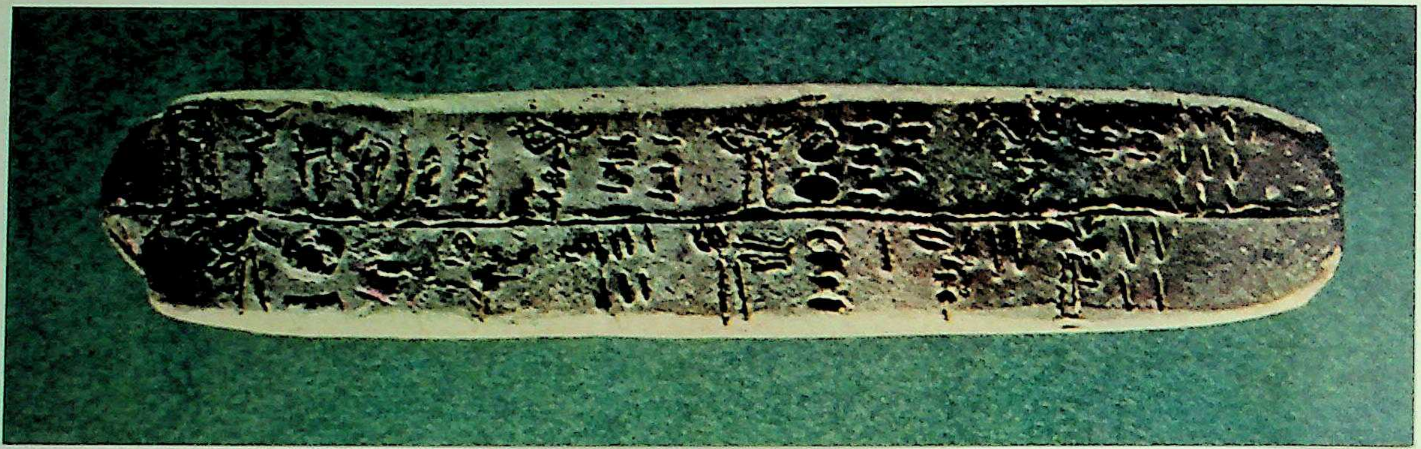
Pastoral scene 137

Greek ruins, Lato 138



also yielded another figure, similar in style, of a young girl on a swing supported by two pillars topped by birds symbolizing the divine presence. These two figures indicate that the Cretan terracotta artists did, at least occasionally, depart from traditional forms.

The last Cretan work of art shown in this book (p. 135) is a terracotta head, Late Minoan and broken, which was found in the sacred cave of Psychro. The wide eyes already seem to be gazing anxiously at the new world heralded by the first arrivals of the Dorians—those implacable, iron-clad men from the north who were soon to reduce the Minoan palaces to smoking rubble.

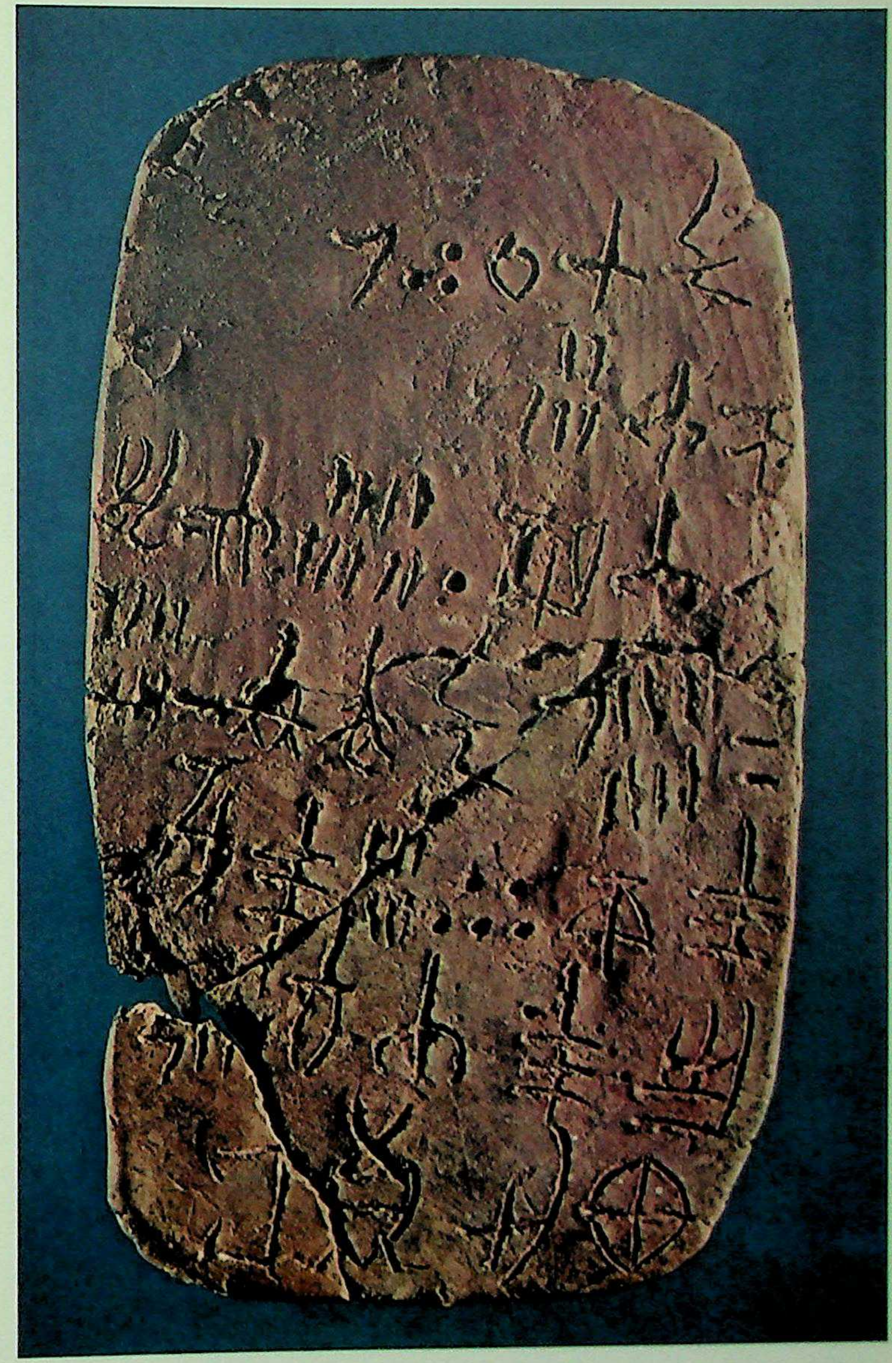


Terracotta tablet, Linear B script, LM II

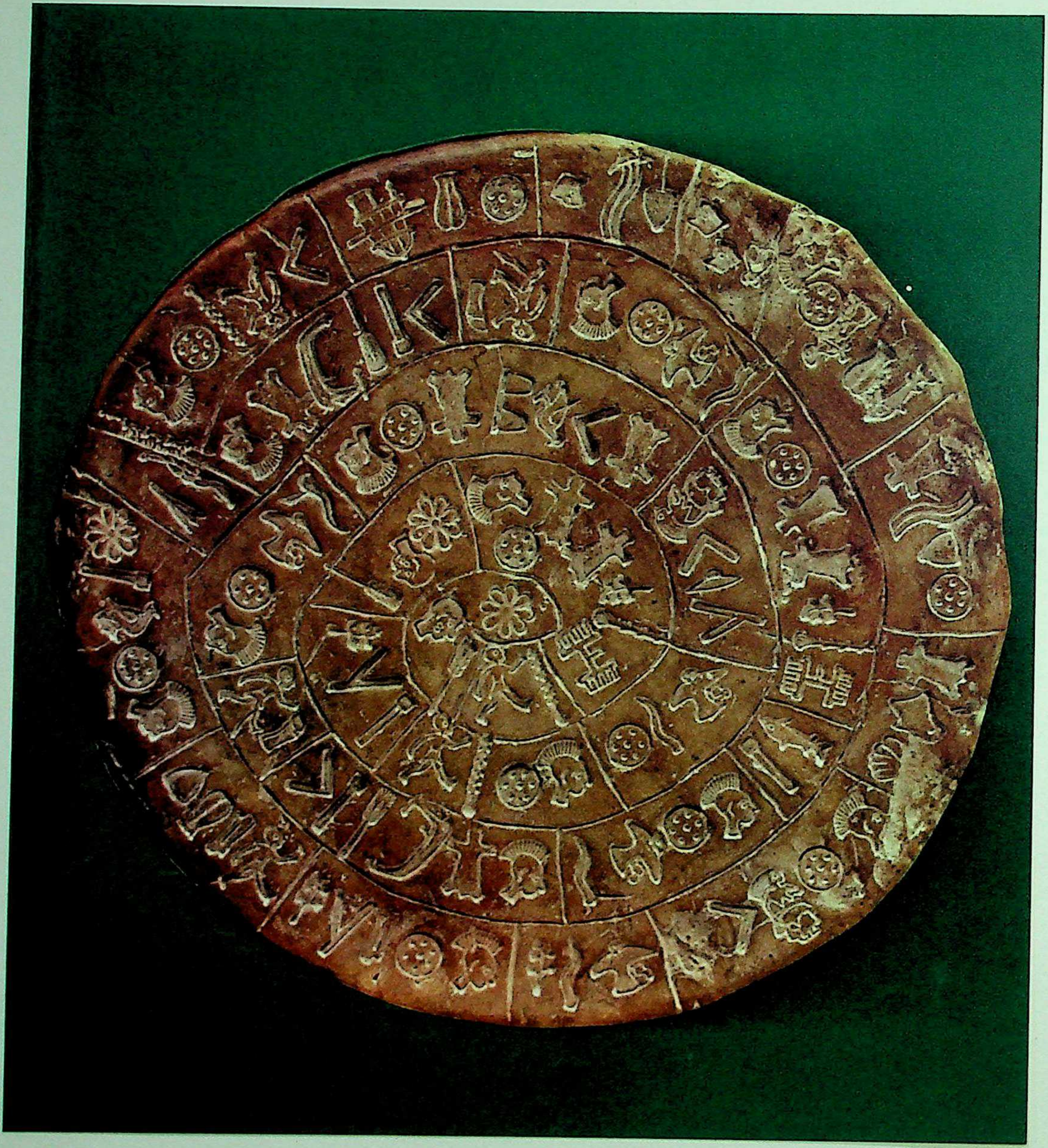
OUR MINOAN HERITAGE

For a period of some five hundred years, from about 2000 to 1500 B.C., the Minoan civilization displayed an incomparable brilliance. Palace after palace arose on the same spot, in Knossos, Mallia and Phaistos. If earthquakes or other catastrophes overthrew them, they were promptly rebuilt. The continuity of the palaces was never interrupted.

In the fifteenth century B.C., the Achaeans, who by then had long been masters of the Peloponnese, appear to have extended their rule to include Crete—under what conditions and circumstances we do not know. The most convincing evidence of their presence in Crete is provided by the tablets inscribed in Linear B which were found in Knossos; they testify that the official palace language at that time was Greek. This can only be explained by assuming that the Achaeans had come to rule Crete.



Terracotta tablet, Linear A script, MM III



Terracotta disc, probably Asian hieroglyphic script, Phaistos, MM III

We might paraphrase Horace, and say at this stage, 'Creta capta ferum victorem cepit' ('Crete, although conquered, subdued its fierce victor'). The Achaeans in the Peloponnese and in Boeotia had already been under the influence of Minoan culture for centuries; once they were actually in Crete, they inevitably slipped into its manners and customs. They became, so to speak, 'Minoized'. Under their rule, Crete enjoyed one last golden age.

Around 1400 B.C., something cataclysmic happened. An uprising of the Minoans against their foreign masters? A fresh invasion from the mainland? All we know for certain is that the palace of Knossos was pillaged and burnt down, never to be rebuilt. A rather wretched township grew up on the ruins.

The Minoan civilization lingered on for two more centuries, but it was a shadow, almost a caricature of its former self. In the fourteenth, thirteenth and twelfth centuries B.C., the people of Knossos still venerated the Great Goddess. An idol in her image was found in one of their sanctuaries. Its body is cylindrical, surmounted by a tiny head on a long neck, and two disproportionately large arms ending in massive hands with spread fingers. It looks like a more or less anthropomorphic, three-branched candlestick (p. 98). We have but to compare this with the 'Snake Goddess' statuettes (pp. 77, 79) from the 'great period' to get a clear picture of the decline of religious fervour and the extent of the decay of Minoan culture.

It is thought that the Dorians swept into Crete in the twelfth century. They ruled until Hellenistic, indeed Roman, times. But this did not mean the disappearance of the Minoan population. We know that certain groups of them withdrew to remoter, less fertile regions, and managed to lead a relatively independent existence for a long time. The majority, though, lived more or less in a state of serfdom, and, like the helots in Laconia, tilled the soil for their Dorian overlords. These unassimilated native Cretans are mentioned by the ancient writers, Homer in particular, and referred to as 'Eteo-Cretans'. There are many indications that these degenerate descendants of the Minoans remained faithful to their own language and customs over a long period, and that they continued to observe their ancient rites in the caves and hill-sanctuaries. We still know very little about the Crete of the Dorians; it acquired a tradition of wise legislation, which Plato presented as a model in his 'Laws', of a strict moral code and doughty warriors. The country does not seem to have led quite such a withdrawn, marginal existence as we used to think; nevertheless, its contribution to Greek civilization was small—certainly where art, literature and philosophy are concerned. Like Sparta, it stood out chiefly by virtue of its political and military institutions. Do we not owe to Dorian Crete the most important Greek judicial text known to us: the famous inscription from Gortyna, a city in the Messara plain, not far from Phaistos? The 'Laws of Gortyna', indicate a remarkably advanced legal code.

Centuries passed. Roman Crete, whose capital was Gortyna, and whose first bishop was Titus, the recipient of one of the Apostle Paul's Epistles, was succeeded by Byzantine Crete. Churches and chapels rose upon the heights were once the Great Goddess, Zeus and other divinities were worshipped. Then the Venetians conquered the island. Their rule was essentially military and fiscal; it had as little cultural effect as did that of the Turks who replaced them, and who, in name at least, remained rulers of the island until 1912. Under the foreign masters, Crete retained its individuality and the Cretans their pride.

He would indeed be a naïve traveller who expected to find anything Minoan in present-day Cretan life—to encounter 'La Parisienne' of Knossos around the next street corner in Heraklion. All the same, the history of Crete can claim a remarkable continuity. Though conquerors succeeded one another, the original roots of the population remained. And if we leave the highways and venture into the valleys or up to the heights of the Lassithi and Idaean mountains, we can still come upon villages and settlements where life seems hardly to have changed since the days of the king of Knossos. The houses are still made of dry stone and mortar. The plough, the wine-press and the mill have remained the same for thousands of years; sheep and goats still graze upon the slopes; the sowing, the harvest, the grape-gathering and the olive-picking still follow one another in unchanging sequence, while the women spin and weave with motions which seem to have come down from the early reaches of time. But the idyll is unlikely to last much longer. One generation—perhaps two—and modern developments will finally edge out or destroy this ancestral way of life. It is doomed to disappear. Still, these are merely the least original relics of Minoan civilization, elements that were the most common to all the Mediterranean area.

The true legacy of that civilization reached us by a different route, and in a form so altered and disguised that we are only now beginning to be aware of it. It was through the Achaeans, the Hellenes and the Romans that certain Minoan cultural values have come down to us. Increasingly we are beginning to realize that these values are basic components of Greek civilization. Nowhere more than in Argolis and Attica did the pre-Hellenic indigenous elements and the Greek contributions merge more harmoniously. And it was precisely in Attica that Greek civilization flourished most brilliantly and prepared to make its widest impact. Much more research will be needed before we can know the extent and nature of the Minoan elements that contributed towards shaping the appearance of Classical Greece, the Athens of Pericles. But it is already clear that Minoan influence upon art and religion is far greater and more decisive than was previously suspected. Undoubtedly, Crete is one of the sources from which Western civilization sprang.

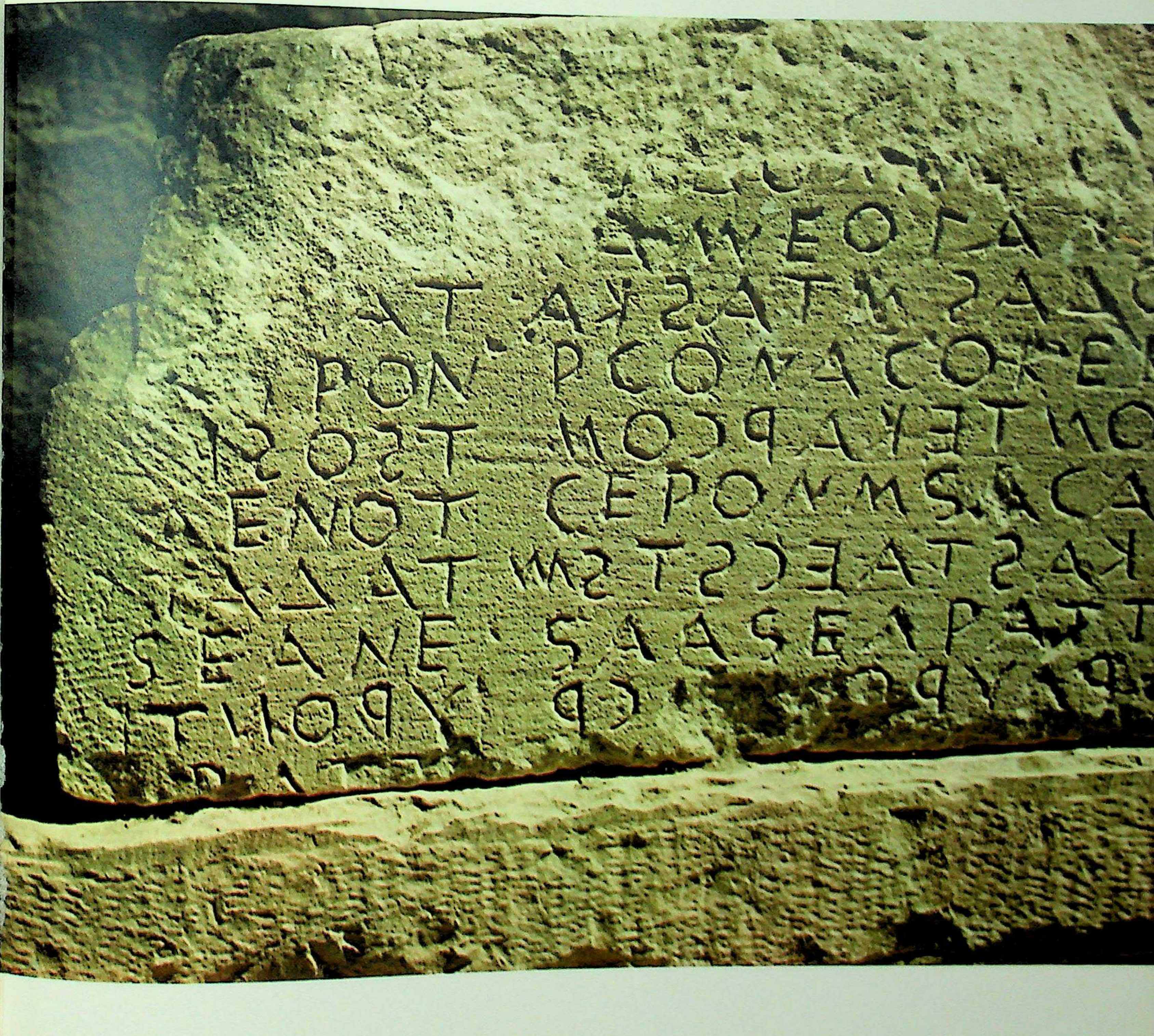
In this connection, a look at the language can be very rewarding. A great many words in common European use are of Minoan origin: words such as wine, oil, mint, absinthe, rose, hyacinth, narcissus, sandal, sack, sponge, purple, zither and syringe. And when we refer to a governor, or to the laity, we are using words which have Cretan roots. If so many words in our vocabulary are of Minoan origin, is there not reason to think that more of our culture than we have yet come to realize may have been transmitted to us, via the Greeks, from Crete?

One day, perhaps, we shall solve more of this mystery. Meanwhile, the very existence of the mystery is a fascinating thing in itself. For over half a century the archaeologists have been bringing Minoan Crete back to life, yet the one and only script yet deciphered—Linear B, a half syllabic, half alphabetical version of the Greek spoken by the Achaeans—leaves us little the wiser. The enigmatic discus from Phaistos with its hieroglyphs (p. 142), which is apparently of Anatolian origin, and the tablets inscribed with Linear A (p. 141), still resist every effort to elucidate them. Even if we succeed in deciphering them, we might well be disappointed; in all probability they are simply inventory lists of administrative documents.

The empire of King Minos left us no historical texts: in this respect, even though it had its own writing, it belongs to prehistory. Historical and chronological light can only be thrown on it from its contacts with Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, and the Hittites. It is, in fact, the archives of the Hittites that may one day disclose more about the Minoan kingdom than the final deciphering of the Linear A tablets.

And yet this silence cannot detract from the significance of the Minoan period, for we cannot help feeling, intuitively, that there are close affinities between ourselves and this early civilization—the first in which the human personality, free from imposed constraint, was able to come into full flower.

Fragment of the 'Laws of Gortyna', Greek inscription from the fifth century B.C., Gortyna 147



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